



Is There a Correlation Between Losing Faith and Moving? | An Interview with Ryan Gottfredson

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Anthony Sweat 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 Sweat's entire interview in the Questioning Saints library by going to [LeadingSaints .org slash 14](https://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 you're checking us out as maybe a potential podcast you could start listening to. I know many of you have been listening for a long time, but let me just talk to the newbies for a minute. What is Leading Saints? What are we trying to do here with this podcast? Let me explain. Leading Saints is a nonprofit organization, a 501c3 is what they call it, and we have a mission to help Latter -day Saints be better prepared to lead. Now, of course, often means in the context of a calling. It may mean in your local community, your work assignments. We've heard about our content influencing all sorts of leaders in all sorts of different contexts. We invite you to listen to this episode and maybe a few others of our 500 plus episodes that we have out there, jump in and begin to learn and begin to consider some of these principles we talk about on the Leading Saints podcast. Here we go. Well, you're always in for a treat when Ryan Gottfredson is on the podcast. I've forgotten how many times we've been on the podcast, but if you go to Google and type in Leading Saints and then Ryan Gottfredson and look at all the episodes that come up, by

the way, that's the easiest way to search for content on Leading Saints. Just go to Google, type in Leading Saints, then whatever keyword, and you'll usually find what you're looking for. Now, Ryan, if you're not familiar with Ryan, he's a Ph .D., really smart fellow. He's a mindset author, researcher and consultant. He's written some phenomenal books. Here's another Leading Saints tip. If you go to LeadingSaints .org slash books, you will find a list of our top most recommended books for church leaders in the context of, in various contexts, depending on what issue you're dealing with. Then Ryan's books are on that list and they're so helpful and awesome. Ryan's also currently a leadership and management professor at the College of Business and Economics at California State University, Fullerton. He holds a Ph .D. in organizational behavior and human resources from Indiana University and a bachelor's from Brigham Young University. He basically has the career path, the education path. If I was a better student, I probably would have gone the path of Ryan, and it's going to be obvious why in this discussion. We talk about this dynamic that happens, maybe you haven't noticed, maybe you have, but when people leave the church or step away from their faith, they often do it in conjunction with a move. Right? That they'll think, I'm not sure about this gospel and it's kind of hard to sort of stop going to church, so why don't we move? And then we have a big reset and continue on a different path within a new neighborhood, around new people. And our board will just think, hey, we moved, and hopefully they'll forget about us and not worry about us. And so we want to dissect that, why that is, and it leads to a great discussion about community, about building culture, about how do we find those individuals earlier on in the process rather than going to their home and begging them to come to the word barbecue because they've been inactive for a year, how do we find them earlier on so that we can establish connection and relationship and find, help them see that they have a home here and believe it or not, that'll actually stimulate faith and develop faith in our gospel tenants and whatnot. So it's a phenomenal discussion. We both get on soap boxes at various times, especially me, and this isn't like an interview as much as a discussion. We want to model a discussion about this topic and we hope that you take this discussion to what I frame as the revelation machine to your word council or to your word altogether and talk about this. How can we anticipate those who are stepping away and create a culture in our word where they feel like they can stick around a little bit longer? So here's my discussion with Ryan Gottfredson. Today I have the opportunity once again to connect with Ryan Gottfredson. What's up, Ryan? Hey, thanks for having me on again. You're not sick of me yet. Oh, we don't have you around enough, Ryan. I'm ready to just hand the reins over to you and say, give us a weekly podcast, but I don't think you want to do that. No, you do such a great job. You're always putting out such good stuff and I love the variety in it. You've got kind of, I'm going to say a little bit more traditional nuts and bolts stuff, but then you've also got some really thought provoking stuff and I personally, I like the really thought provoking stuff and I think that's what's kind of led us to have this conversation.

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Yeah, for sure. And people, I'll make sure we share your bio and background and whatnot. At the end of the day, Ryan's a PhD in the leadership world and he's writing books and teaching classes and really is a deep thinker about these things. And I love, I sent out this weekly newsletter and you're right, sometimes I hope they're thought provoking, but sometimes I'm like, well, I'm going to go down this path and sort of own it for a bit and see how people respond because I want people to think, even if people disagree with the newsletter that we put out there, that's okay, I just want you to think about it. And I oftentimes I'll get some responses back and it sort of shifts my thinking like, oh, now I see it differently and probably would write that newsletter a different way. But we go back and forth, whether it's email, text or whatnot about different concepts because you're up to your elbows in different leadership research and I'm sort of in similar worlds and similar reading and whatnot. And we're always sort of taking principles to the Latter-day Saint world and seeing how they mesh or what we can learn and whatnot. And so this topic came up about this, we've talked about before, I think your first interview, which we'll link to on Leading Saints was about this concept of faith crises or people struggling or questioning their faith and what does that mean and why and what is the organization or the culture of war to blame and whatnot. And I think early on, you initially pointed this out that when people leave the church, it's very common that people leave the church in the middle or involved with a move, like they sell their house and they literally relocate to a different ward because we have a geographic based structure, a good reset is to literally move and reset. I mean, how would you frame this dynamic? Yeah, there's a life transition. I mean, one of the things that I feel like that happens in the church is because of the geographic proximity of our wards and boundaries or ward boundaries, we have a tendency to build really strong social ties. I mean, that's one of the best things about the church, in my opinion, is the enable to build these social ties. But when somebody has some experiences, whatever those might be, that caused them to leave the church, the first step is for them to just kind of take a step back in their current wards. They're still present. They're still visible. They're still involved socially, but they take a step back in terms of, I would say, their spirituality. And I think if people leave the church, they usually don't do it in front of the people that they have these strong social ties with. I think my observation and I've seen it because I've seen many couples my age leave our ward. And then I later find out they left the church shortly thereafter. You kind of like call them up on the phone and you're saying, how's your ward? And they're like, oh, OK, and that's sad. Right. I get what you're saying here. And it just and what kills me about this phenomenon of people taking advantage of a move to leave the church is that the ward that had these people in it that then left the church, they effectively detach themselves while they're a part of that ward. But the ward really never gets that feedback. Right. Because, oh, they moved there. Another word. Other word has a records. We're not responsible. And if somebody leaves that ward, I found generally doesn't know that that family left the church or even if they were to come to find out. There's never any kind of after action review of what could we have done differently? Yeah. Or they don't even attach that event to their ward culture. Right. They don't think they don't connect those dots of like, well, they moved and now they're not attending or that maybe they've completely removed their names from the records or whatnot. Man, maybe, you know, why did that happen at this moment? Right. It just seems to have happened. We don't it's harder to be self-reflective about it. It is really tough. And what I mean, my heart goes out to any like bishop because there are so many urgent problems that you should have to deal with. And when you talk about what exactly

what you've said is what has been the culture of the ward and what role has that played in people potentially disconnecting from the church? That's not an urgent problem. That's a big picture on a big scale, potential conversation to have. But we rarely ward leaders rarely have space or create space to have some of those bigger, more strategic conversations. Yeah. And I'm just thinking like, you know, there may be people listening to this who have a loved one who has left the church and they go, they didn't move or that didn't happen or or that move was related to something else. Right. But I think a lot of this or some of this happens subconsciously because I think, you know, for somebody who begins to question their faith and has intense doubting and even loses their faith, I can be extremely traumatic experience and even going around the home and like taking down the picture of the temple and packing it away, like even that sort of feels too much.

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Right. And so to just sort of pack it up, you know, no pun intended in this experience of like, I think we just need to move. In fact, I've been thinking about changing jobs or I've always wanted to live in this other state or whatever it is. And then it really is a simple way to reset all things in life as you move and get different habits or, you know, and because, you know, I've talked with some individuals just even after leaving the church, you stop attending, even just engaging on a superficial level with your neighbors or fellow Latter-day Saints is really awkward. And people don't know what to say. They they want to say something they want to reach out, but it's easy not to. And so there's just so many dynamics happening that that move can be a logical reset on all things in life. Oh, for sure. Yeah, you're exactly right, because it's like if you leave the church and you stay in the ward boundaries, there's a social cost for that. But there's no social cost for leaving the church when you move. Right. And so to your point, I don't think everybody who leaves the church does it when they move. Some people do it and they stay there, you know, and that's that's fine. But the whole I think the whole purpose of us having this conversation is to just almost try to get ward leaders to think, what can we do as a ward to really ensure that there is life in our congregations to the degree that we're aware of when people start to disaffect a little bit so that we could do something about it while they're there, as opposed to find out that they disaffected and left the church after they move. Yeah. And this is this is an interesting dynamic that happens in different contexts as well or different with different problems. And you I mean, you've done a lot of research as far as mindfulness and being open minded or closed minded. And and like you talk about, I don't know if you have a statistic or something, but generally most people really sincerely feel that they're open minded people in reality. In reality, if you've all around, that's not the case. Right. Or if you analyze their behavior and whatnot. And so a part of this is just assuming the problem there is there even when you don't see it, right? Like sometimes I run into a, you know, as we've done topics on maybe LGBTQ issues or pornography, and every once in a while, I'll hear a bishop say, oh, like, I'm so glad you put this information. You know, it's not really a problem in my ward, but I'm sure it's a problem elsewhere. And the minute I hear that, I'm like, you know, alert, alert, alert, you know, like,

obviously, there's some self awareness that's lacking there. It's best to even assume that's there, because what happens is we we assume it's not happening or, you know, faith is pretty good. You know, we have a great testimony meeting. People show up to Sunday school and yeah, it's not perfect, but, you know, things are going great. And then when it does happen or we're not aware of it or you don't connect it. And so just assuming that it's happening, I think that's sort of the first step, because then you can begin to ask yourself questions of if it is happening, what would we change do differently? Or how can we make this a safer place so that people will raise their hand or, you know, reach out to the leader and let them know that, you know, their questioning has begun and they're doubting and they're questioning their role in their local community and whatnot? Yeah, for sure. And that that's really the tricky part, right, is how do you create that type of community that allows people to naturally surface their doubts and concerns? And here's one of the things that I've just observed and maybe the way that I felt is that I feel like our church culture has so many wonderful things about it and everything, I believe, is incredibly well intended. But there is an element about our church culture that I think gets in the way of people surfacing some doubts and concerns that they may have. And the aspect of our culture that I feel like fuels that is there is a culture of certainty, like we value certainty, we value people who feel certain about their faith and their testimony. We have testimony meetings where people stand up and say, I know, I know, I know. And we're kind of instructed, I feel like I've been instructed, like if you can't come up and bear a short, clean, crisp testimony about the things that you know, we kind of don't want you up at the pulpit. And the reality is, is that while that certainty, I think, helps people feel a sense of belonging for people who don't share that same level of certainty, it prevents them from feeling comfortable about raising doubts or questions or concerns. Yeah.

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And this is what can create the illusion that this problem isn't going on in your nobody's ward because bringing it up. Like they can set an appointment with my executive secretary and I'll meet with them and nobody's doing that. So it must not be happening. Right. And for those listening, you and I did I mean, mainly you did the prep and the writing about it, but you wrote a series on leading saints. And we did an episode where we sort of talk about it's called Whatever Leaders Should Consider About Community in Their Wards. And because what you're getting out, if I'm hearing it right, is this concept of safety. Like, are you developing a culture and a community where people can say, I don't know, I just don't know. And it's almost like if we had maybe every fifth month, we had a fast and I don't know meeting, you know, and I know it sounds ridiculous, but nonetheless, like creating this place where people get up like, you know, I strongly believe in Joseph Smith, but I don't know about Brigham Young, whatever it is. And again, these aren't things nor should they come up during a Sunday school class or sacrament type per se. I mean, there are definitely ways to do it, but it comes back to the safety that we're developing, right? Yeah, for sure. And I've just been tempted personally to stand up in testimony meeting and say, hey, I know that most of you have a really strong testimony of the church, but I

also know that there's some of you who don't feel like they have a very strong testimony and don't feel like they have a place to talk about it. And just if that's you, like, can we go out to dinner sometime? Yeah, I love it. It's like talk about it like I'm just making myself available, you know, type thing. And and I'm not sure if I'm the right person to do that, but I'd be happy to do it. Right. I think it'd be preferable if we had, you know, church leaders do it type thing. But there really isn't space in our regular meetings to have those types of conversations that the gospel is all about, right? The gospel is about connection. It's about growth. It's about becoming better. You know, it's about finding the lost sheep. All right. And how our typical meetings are typically structured is it just doesn't create much space for the one sheep that's yeah, maybe on the fringe a little bit. Yeah. You know, I sent out a newsletter about this a few weeks ago. I I love there's certain evangelical pastors that I love to listen to their YouTube sermons. And, you know, not everything jives, but I just appreciate monitoring their presentation style. And and sometimes they bring some really fascinating insight about, you know, biblical things. Andy Stanley is one of my favorites. And I kept as I've watched many of the sermons, this common theme kept coming up where he would assume that there were non -Christians in the audience or he'd say things like, now Christians believe this. And I realize some of you in the room who aren't Christian or kind of have this mixed past with or the checkered past with with Christians are sort of not sure about this. And that's good. Let's talk through it. Right. Like he's assuming they're in the room and there's so much we can do to create that safety by just assuming there. And to your point, it really goes far when a leader can just stand and do that. Of course, anybody can lead and stand. And like you mentioned and and put that call out. But it's so powerful for a leader to stand and say, you know, that I hear so much out there about individuals who struggle with their faith. And it made me think, wow, we don't really deal with that a lot in my ward. But then that made me double think maybe we're missing it. Maybe we haven't created a place for people to talk. I just want you to know I'm willing to just sit down and listen to your story. Right. Again, you're creating safety and the invitation to really draw those people out. So hopefully they don't have to find the realtor and put the sign in the yard and and move because they have to escape their community to feel like they to be authentic to themselves. Right. Yeah, for sure. If we want to create a community in which people feel safe and where they feel like they belong, we need to create opportunities for the voices of people who come from these other groups. I'm not saying we need to tell the Orthodox to shut up. That's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is there's some people that have valuable perspectives that are not being heard. And there are people that are a part of those perspectives that if they don't hear from their people, they're more likely to kind of start to disengage. Yeah. And this goes back to the concept. Another concept I've written about in the newsletter is that STP, right, the same 10 people. Like we wonder why is it always the same people being called because because they're the safe choices. And that that's a good reason why this may happen, right? Yeah, it is. It's interesting because I do think it boils down to a trust factor. It's a way. And again, bishops have so much on their plates to begin with. They're stuck in the urgent.

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And to call somebody to give a talk that ruffles a few feathers just means more work for them. Right. So I'm sensitive to that dynamic, but that's what makes it tricky for bishops, I think, at times to try to create a community that's more open. Right. And I'm just going to like going back to the different episodes that I see, like the statistics of episodes that the ones that really take off. Right. I'm just thinking like Rob Farrell, Kurt Brown, Jason Hunt. You know, these are really dynamic leaders who did something dynamic in their wards that people are drawn to their message, think, wow, like that is what dynamic leadership looks like. I want to be that type of leader or I wish we had more type of those types of leaders. And I think it's because they do some of these things. And to me, all comes down to risk, right, which is sort of in line with this trust dynamic that you mentioned is to really shift culture. It's going to take some risk, right, to put that person in that position and think, man, this could just be a dumpster fire, you know, for like a better term, like this could just not go well and there's going to be a lot of balls dropped or it's going to empower somebody that the cultural person showing up to feel like, wow, like I have a place here. My voice is heard and I don't do it like the other guy. But, you know, it can be really messy in this in this journey. Let me share something, if it's OK. To me, this has been like so far in 2023, the biggest light bulb that has gone off for me. OK, so I'm going to pull some ideas from the business world and then I'm going to kind of integrate them into our church environment. So one of the things that we're finding in the business world is that, well, what we know is that most organizational leaders, they focus on results. They're focused on what's measured. And that makes sense, right? And we want results. We want to hit the certain numbers. Oftentimes we've got shareholders or stakeholders that are kind of relying upon us to hit those numbers. Right. Yeah. So that makes sense. But what we find is that I'm not going to say focusing on numbers is bad, but it can be misguided. And here's why. It's because what we're learning is that the more organizations focus on hitting numbers, the less willing they are to try new and innovative things, because new and innovative things are unproven. And if they try them, they're not sure they will hit their numbers. And so what we find is that the more organizations focus on the numbers, on the outcomes, the less lively they are. They actually are growing increasingly stagnant the more they keep doing what has worked in the past and the more they resist doing what might work better in the future. And so there's a woman that I follow. I really respect her ideas. Her name is Nadia Zecsenbayeva. She's from Kazakhstan. I had to learn how to pronounce her name. So she calls herself the chief reinvention officer. And what organizations are finding is that organizations need to reinvent themselves every three to five years or else they're going to go. Bob Quinn, I think maybe somebody you've had on the show in the past, he calls this dynamic organizations are either going through deep change or a slow death. That's your two options. So what Nadia Zecsenbayeva says is in order for leaders to be agile and to be future ready to be able to navigate into the future more effectively, they shouldn't focus on results. Instead, she says they should focus on how much life there is in the system. So how much life is there in the system today and how much life do we think will be in the system tomorrow? An optimism about the life in the system. And the reason why I find this concept interesting as it relates to church and what we've talked about with Orthodox, when you think about other faiths that are more you get the Jewish Orthodox, you get the Orthodox Christians. Generally, the perception is there's not a lot of life in the system. And I wonder if we would do well as church leaders and members to think about how much life is there in the system today and are we creating more and more life in the system? And is there an optimism that there's

going to be more life in the system in the future? And I wonder if we just kind of had a discussion within our wards, how much life is there in the system? Right. And then I think even we went back and forth about this via email is how would we measure that? I think you given the idea of how loud do we see with the hymns? And yeah, I think that that's probably a decent measure of life.

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Right. But what are other measures or indications of life in the system, not just today, but then this optimism, are we hopeful that there will be more life in the future or are we just kind of like dragging our knuckles on the ground? Like, I got to go to church today because I've got a calling. You know, I think every word is going to be different in terms of their measure of life. But I think we would do well to think about it. And I think this is a question that we really have to force. And I'm just like contrasting it to, you know, say an evangelical pastor, a Baptist pastor, who Baptist preacher who decides to start his own church, like if he doesn't keep life in his church or if he doesn't succeed or create a culture that people want to show up, like he goes out of business. Where I love the structure of our church and I love the resources we have. And I'm glad that, you know, back in the 80s, when my dad was Bishop, he had to stand up and ask for people to, you know, pay the utility bills and whatnot or, you know, like we don't have to do that now, which is awesome. But at the same time, we have less consequence for that. What was it? The slow death that Bob Quinn talks about, right? Yeah. If there is a slow death, we just sort of consolidate towards or redo the boundaries. And nobody really thinks, oh, maybe that would cause that. Now, I don't, I realize that sometimes there's just different demographics that cause, you know, geographic adjustments and whatnot in my words. But like here in Orange County, we just recently, two stakes, our stake and another stake just like combined. Yeah, the church has been dying, at least where I'm at in North Orange County for quite a long time, because of the rising home prices and how difficult it is to afford. And don't get me wrong, that's surely a really big factor. But I don't hear anybody saying, well, have our church meetings been lacking, right? Nobody's asking that question, which I think it's a valuable question to ask. Like, are we creating the activities that people not of our faith actually want to attend? Are we creating church meetings and sacrament meetings that people are excited to attend? If we're not doing that, it wouldn't be a surprise to see kind of a slow death, right? And so I think these are just really good questions to force the issue with. Again, just assume that the slow death is happening. If we did live in a world where the slow death is happening in our world, what would we do differently, right? And put that in the revelation machine, the revelation council, and see what comes out. Because I think that's such a worthwhile question to consider, right? Yeah, well, and I like that. Can I get a revelation machine? It seems like you've got to hook up. And I always come back to this, like, I look at like on paper, I always give elders quorum a bad time. But I look on paper, the idea of elders quorum is like revolutionary, right? But nobody's turned on the engine. Like, can we just like get this thing going, right? And I'm not trying to be too cynical, but I realize I come across that way at times. But like, these are questions worth asking and saying,

like, what if this looked completely different and was fulfilling or not? And I want to, you know, maybe pause here and just like, shout out to those that are listening. They're like, hey, Ryan and Kurt, I like my ward and I go every week. I've been in this ward for 40 years. It's a great ward. Like, we get that that's happening. But again, we can't project our own experience on others and think, well, I like the wards or anybody else would like the ward. There are people that are questioning their faith. And that may be the effectiveness of your ward may be the reason why they can't bring it to you, right? Because everybody's happy at church. Everybody likes the ward. And I'm wrestling with these issues and I don't know what to do with them. And this doesn't feel like a place I can bring it, right? So maybe it'd be a great ward that also, you know, feels really safe for those people to bring it up, right? So anyways, what comes to mind? I think we brought it up in a prior podcast that recorded, but it was about five years ago with my own ward. I went up to the Elders Quorum First Counselor and I said, hey, can we survey the members of our Elders Quorum? I want to ask them how psychologically safe they feel our Elders Quorum is. And at first, the First Counselor was like, what? Of course, everybody's psychologically safe. This is like, I love these guys. These are like the best guys in the world. And I'm thinking in my mind, yeah, you're the guy who talks about every other time the teacher asks a question, right? Clearly, you feel psychologically safe, but I'm not worried about you. I'm curious about everybody else. And so he was really resistant for me to survey the Elders Quorum. And finally, I twisted his arm hard enough and got him to.

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And what we found from that, and these are the active members of the Elders Quorum. We didn't do people that were not attending. These are the active members of the Elders Quorum. And what we found is that 33 % of the members of our Elders Quorum did not feel safe to speak up or comment during Elders Quorum. I'd say that's probably falls about average, if not a lot. Yeah, yeah. Wow. That's awesome. So we've, I don't know if there's more to, we've sort of wandered a little bit from our original question. I want to pivot back a little bit, unless there's maybe more areas and caveats to explore. But coming back to this dynamic of like, this is having, you know, we talked about the slow death of an organization may be happening, which is impacting the slow death of somebody's faith and testimony, right? So how do we identify the slow dying testimony? Because by the time they say they're moving, by the time they go inactive, because this is generally what happens, right? We get the, I don't know what the report's called, but you can pull all sorts of reports, right? And you can see maybe the endowed without recommend list, right? Wow. There's this name here, this family that they're endowed, they were still in the temple. We haven't, we've never seen them. They moved in the ward maybe a year ago, like we've never seen them. And so what we do is we think we're going to, all right, let's, you know, link arms, let's go over there with our casseroles and let's throw a barbecue and get the chili cook -off invite, you know, flyer over there. And we knock on their door and this is sort of this awkward exchange, but we push through and hand them the invite and say, we'll see you there. You know, I mean, bless your heart for trying, but it is like, so much

has transpired to that point. Like it is, it's so much more difficult at that point to step in rather than at this early point of just assessing and analyzing where our, our culture is in our ward, right? Yeah. So we talked about, which I think is a good discussion to have, which is how do we measure life in the church? Yeah. Which is good. But then we could also ask, what are the measures that might indicate somebody is stepping back a little bit and are we sensitive to those things? And then the next question is also, what do we do when we see somebody is stepping back a little bit, right? I would say, and this is just me, cause I'm sure I'm as guilty as anybody, but I know like when I was a missionary, I would come into a house and I would say, you know, if it's a less active, somebody stopped going to church, I'd say, we give you a lesson. Let's give you a lesson, right? And cause we're thinking like by the power of our testimony, the spirit will convey a change in their hearts. And, you know, now that I'm about 20 years removed from my, my missionary days, I feel like I would go back and I would do something so incredibly different than what I did. And what I would do is I would go and I would just listen. I would just ask questions. Tell me about your faith. How has it changed over time? Where are you currently at? How did you get there? Right. As I'm saying this, I'm having like flashback, like not a good flashback. Maybe it's like a traumatic flashback. We had a member of our stake presidency come visit us. Like, I think it was like ward conference time. And for some reason we were selected as a family. You got on the list, Ryan. So maybe there was some indication of me like removing myself, but this member of the stake presidency came over, he stayed for an hour and a half. And I'm not sure I said more than about 20 words during that hour and a half. Like the guy just like talked, right? And I'm just like, all right, buddy, like, I don't know how you live, but I don't always have an hour and a half on my weeknight to shoot the breeze, you know, this type thing. And so I think that that's, you know, anyways, that's some encouragement for church leaders. If we see a signal that somebody's stepping back in any way, just be interested. Just ask questions because that's going to help them to feel like you care. Because when we feel like we have a voice, when anybody feels that way, a church member, an employee, anybody, when we feel like we have a voice, we feel value. And people who are starting to step back are usually people who are feeling, I don't have a voice and I don't feel value. Right. Yeah, I think my mind goes to there's there's few words more powerful in building a relationship and connection than tell me your story, right? Like, let me hear it. And good or bad, I'd love to hear it. Right. And just in the again, going to the reference in the Garden of Eden, God says, Adam, where are you? You know, like, tell me just where you're at. And I think that's such a loving phrase because he could have said, what have you done? I can't believe you did this. No, he said, where are you? Because you're hiding from me for some reason. But I just want to know where you're at. What's your story? How did you get to where you're at right now? That's interesting. I just, yeah, God didn't say, can we give you a lesson? That's a different version, different multiverse of the Bible.

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Yeah. But yeah, it's true. Like, and this is you see this in various dynamics, right? You and there may be leaders listening to this thinking, OK, what we're going to do is the next fifth Sunday, we're going to talk about this. We're going to talk at it. We're going to give them a lesson. Right. And this I mean, that is sure those structures and contexts are helpful. And I love to Sunday lessons or whatever. But when we try and solve problems through talking to people, we really don't get as far as we we anticipated. Well, I hope if there's somebody, you know, particularly a bishop, if they're listening to this, but it could be anybody in any calling within their responsibility is just the church on Sunday. Just try to pay attention to how much life is there in sacrament or in Sunday school or in primary and even how much life is there in our ward council. If we're not bringing life into our ward council meetings, I think we're probably going to have a hard time bringing life into our church meetings. Yeah, that's really helpful. I'm thinking of the you know, you talk about those people who are slowly stepping back from the culture, from the faith, from their belief and whatnot, like identifying and whatnot. I think there is, you know, and the structure is what it is. I just think of like a bishop, of course, a bishop. I know every bishop listening is like, man, if I knew who those people were like, I would race over their house. I would call them. I would do whatever was needed to reach out to them. But there's so many problems coming at them, right? Their interview schedule is filling up with some serious issues, broken marriages, struggles with pornography, depression, anxiety, like all these things. And then I think a lot of these people who are stepping back, the only time they really interface with their bishop is maybe tithing settlement. And let me tell you what, it's pretty easy to dodge tithing settlement every year. And a lot of people do it. You don't realize how many people dodge tithing settlement until you're the clerk or the bishop and you're like, wow, like there's a lot of people there, right? So we default, right? In our culture, we're like, oh, Ryan, Kurt, is right in front of it. It's ministering. If people would just do ministering, right, then this would be solved. But I think there's even something deeper happening on where there is, you know, I always default to saying, I don't think a lot of people know how to minister to a point where they go to someone and say, tell me your story. Like that could be a very awkward exchange for someone who's not practiced in doing that. And so again, I just think, again, it's on paper, right? Like, yes, we have ministering. I don't know if we figured out how to turn the key on. And then I don't think it's an apathy problem. It's so easy to default to, oh, if people are just not lazy, you know, that this would get done. But I think there's, it really is a cultural thing of just taking a deep breath as a ward culture and saying like, you know, we're going to put away the come follow me manual for a week or two. And like, cause we got to figure this out. If we don't have a culture in place, as I often say, stealing, who's the management thinker? Yeah, Drucker, right. He always says strategy or it's attributed to him. Culture eats strategy for breakfast. And I always, you know, projected on our faith experience or our organizational experience that culture eats doctrine for breakfast. It does not matter how powerful the scriptures are. I'm sorry, like this is, I know this seems so backwards that if we just read the words like magically infuses transformation of people, it does not matter how good the come follow me lesson is if good culture is not there. Culture will swallow it whole. And so you just take a breath and say, we got to figure this out. And I don't even know if it's happening. Maybe everybody does love this word. And this is the, and that's the risk that leaders need to take to say, we're going to open the hood and look into the engine of our ward and see if the engine is even on, right? Going to your, like, is there even power going to the engine that this place can even transform people that this place can bring

people to Jesus Christ? Well, I feel like the word that's coming into my head as you're saying this is that there are people in the church and their leadership callings. Who they operate as managers, right? The managers are the ones that ensure the day to day or the week to week functionality goes smoothly, right? There's a lot of managers in the church, but I'm not sure there's a lot of leaders. Yeah. Would you even say that, would you say that this, just that group is managers are more naturally prone to be more traditional, more Orthodox because it's like, I just need things in a row. I don't know. Maybe there's a correlation there that, or I'm making it up. Well, I think I'm not sure it's just Orthodox, but I think most people are prone to be managers because being a leader requires something of us. It requires stepping out of our comfort zone. It requires us doing more than a manager would do.

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And when we're in lay leadership positions, you know, it's a, it's a tough sell. Let's be honest to kind of go above and beyond just survival. Yeah, survival. And that's why I always joke that sometimes leaders are like, Hey, listen, I turned the lights on and unlock the doors Sunday morning. That's all I got this week. You know, and this is so difficult and complex, especially in a lay leadership. I mean, there's so many things, but again, you know, I feel like this is a discussion worth having and considering because it breaks my heart just to see people step away, you know, and that I really, because it's easy. There's another dynamic I hear, like if we can just create enough resources about Joseph Smith's polygamy or, or blacks in the priesthood, or, you know, insert doctrinal concern. And I, I'm like, these are some heavy, really concerning issues then, and I don't fault anybody who struggles with those things. Right. And I just want to step back and be like, if we can get the relationship right, if we can get the culture right, those things will take care of itself. Like they won't with that relationship. And then the relationship is in two parts. One, I think relationship with their ward community, with their, you know, yeah, with the word community and relationship with God and Jesus Christ. Like, how do you really take your problems to God and find healing and hope and redemption? And then do you find that in your ward culture, if we can dial in those same things? I mean, all these other concerns are so secondary tertiary to, to that, you know? Yeah. Well, I mean, part of where all this came from is because I have seen four or five couples that have moved out of our ward and then shortly thereafter left the church. And it's just, dang it. Like, I wish I would've known. Like, why didn't you tell me? I know. And then it's, well, what didn't I do? Like, did I hinder them from being willing to come forward? Did I not open myself up a little bit more and let them know that I'm somebody that I feel like I could just talk to somebody about it. I could listen. I don't feel like I would be preachy or judgmental. I would just want to be curious. Like, huh, well, I'm happy to talk about it whenever you're interested. Right. Yeah. And I, I just don't feel like, I know that there's people that are willing to do that. I don't know if there's people that are struggling who know who those people are. Yeah. Yeah, it's tough. Well, what are we missing, Ryan? And, uh, do we cover it all? We solved the worst problems. I don't think anything. I just hope, you know, whoever happens to listen to us ramble on about all this just takes away maybe a nugget and

inside a light bulb that goes off about something they could be a little bit more intentional about to create a better culture or to create more life in the system. So that people who may be struggling or, or stepping away is that it allows us the opportunity to better support them earlier in that journey, as opposed to when it's almost too late. And just like, you know, my newsletters, like this discussion is, you know, I had to bring expert Ryan Gottfredson on to tell us the five solutions of fixing this, but it's, it's just worth a discussion, right? It's worth having that, that dialogue. And again, we, we have no keys of the priesthood that can give us authorization to use a revelation machine, but wards do. Right. So take this to your revelation machine, other also known as your ward council, or even just gathering your word on a fifth Sunday and don't have an agenda. Don't put the PowerPoints away or the videos or the whatever, and just say, let's come together as a community. And like, is there power here? Right. How did you put the questions earlier? Was there life in the system? Life. That's right. Yeah. Is there life in our ward? Like, why or why not? You know, and, and just making, you know, increasing that psychological safety best you can. And, uh, well, here's another question that comes to mind. Does healing occur here? Love that. That's awesome. Yeah. Does change occur here? So those are the types of questions that I think would be valuable for, you know, a ward council to, yeah. And that healing one is really powerful and gets me thinking. Cause I think especially in, you know, 2023, it's so easy to like, look at the problems of 2023. Like, you know, just take mental health for instance, like anxiety, depression. I mean, OCD, scrupulosity, insert, whatever it is here. And we naturally, okay, well, that's tough. You're dealing with that. Let's sure. We want to support you, but Hey, get into a good counselor, like stuff there. And, and of course I I'm a proponent of all that stuff and, you know, getting good resources and expert perspectives. But like Christ gospel offers healing, like as far as I understand it. Right. And so even with all that stuff, do you come to church and feel like, Oh, good. Like at least I have church tomorrow. Like at least I can go and just breathe and feel that redemption of Jesus Christ, that healing power.

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At least I can renew that covenant. Like, is there really power behind that and what's getting in the way? And it could be a lot of cultural reasons. Yeah. Spot on. And I'm there, I'm there with you. I, I tend to agree with that. The purpose of Christ's atonement and his sacrifice was to foster healing. And it seemed like that's what his ministry was really about. And I imagine, you know, in our congregations, we should seek to emulate that. Yeah. Awesome. Well, Ryan, I usually have a really awesome question to send us out on, but just let's end with this. What final encouragement after this discussion, the different points, if you're in a room full of ward councils, what final encouragement would you give them? Well, I think as a whole, it's have questions, ask your leadership team, whoever that might be. There's that the bishopric is that the ward council is that the relief society presidency, the primary presidency is create space to ask questions about the health of our current culture. How much life is there in the system? Is any healing occurring? Are we fostering change? Are we optimistic about our future? Right. Just create space to have some of those conversations. Because I believe that the inspiration

machine will only turn on once we ask the question, we're not going to get pinged with lightning about an answer to those types of things before asking the question. It really only occurs after we ask the question. That concludes this episode of the Leading Saints podcast. Hey, listen, would you do me a favor? You know, everybody's got that friend who listens to a ton of podcasts and maybe they aren't aware of Leading Saints. So would you mind taking the link of this episode or another episode of Leading Saints and just texting it to that friend? You know who I'm talking about the friend who always listens to podcasts and is always telling you about different podcasts. Well, it's your turn to tell that friend about Leading Saints. So share it. We'd also love to hear from you. If you have any perspective or thought on this episode, you can go to LeadingSaints.org and actually leave a comment on the episode page or reach out to us at [LeadingSaints.org slash contact](http://LeadingSaints.org/contact). Remember, go to [LeadingSaints.org slash 14](http://LeadingSaints.org/14) to access the remarkable presentation by Anthony Sweat 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. 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.