



“I Give Unto You Weakness” | An Interview with Jim Kasen

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Speaker 1 00:00:02 Have you ever had a loved one leave the church and your relationship becomes awkward. This is so common and so sad. I got the chance to interview the Packard family who have been down this road. Cindy and Blair Packard are orthodox believing parents and Josh, their son and his wife, have left the church. We came together to discuss their journey, and it was amazing what they taught. They talked about the communications they regretted, and how other siblings responded in positive and negative ways. They learned how to pick up the pieces. Again, express love, carry on, and build a beautiful relationship. This has become a favorite in the Questioning Saints Virtual Library. You can actually gain access to this interview@leadingsaints.org slash 14. This will give you 14 days to watch the Packards interview and many others related to helping individuals who begin to question their faith. Go to leading-saints.org/fourteen and get access now.

Speaker 1 00:01:00 Hey, did you know that we video record the vast majority of our interviews on the Leading Saints podcast? That's right. And then we upload it to YouTube because we have a Leading Saints YouTube channel. And you should subscribe, especially if you're the type of person that, uh, listens to the podcast while you do the dishes or work out. You can put up the video and get the more immersive experience by seeing my beautiful mug and also the face of the various guests that are on the Leading Saints podcast. And, uh, it really helps us out to go to YouTube anyways, subscribe to the channel 'cause that helps us dial in the algorithm and reach more people and get these powerful interviews out to leaders across the world who could benefit. So go to YouTube, search for Leading Saints. Find our familiar Red logo and subscribe. All right, today we're having the opportunity to sit down with Jim Kasen. How are you, Jim?

Speaker 2 00:02:00 I'm well, thank you.

Speaker 1 00:02:01 Good. I'm excited to explore this. You've, let's see, you've written a book recently. I have about your story and your journey. Uh, you've done on some podcasts, whatnot. Now it's your turn on the Leading Saints podcast. So I hope you feel ready for this.

Speaker 2 00:02:13 I do. I'm greatly looking forward to having this chance. It's a different topic, but still spills over into everything that I've been working on. So, yeah, that's,

Speaker 1 00:02:22 Now we're gonna include this in our LGBT Saints Virtual Library and Great. 'cause that's part of your story, right? That's right. So we're like, give us a backdrop of your story growing up. Was there a moment that you kind of came to this identity or,

Speaker 2 00:02:35 You know, that's a, that's a great request. At this point, I, I struggled. I was one of two boys in a part member family. I was the youngest and my parents experienced a lot of challenges with each other in terms of my father belonging to the Catholic church, my mother belonging to the LDS church, and both of them not being terribly active when we were born. So I kind of grew up in two churches. Hmm. And that whole process, uh, had a real strong impact on me and caused me to come to grips later in life with the fact that my parents really did love me as much as their broken lives would allow them to love me. I was not your normal child. I started experiencing generalized anxiety disorder at about the age of two. It manifests itself with separation anxiety and was really aimed at my mom.

Speaker 2 00:03:34 And, uh, that was just a real challenge for my parents to deal with and for me to experience. It was unbelievably painful. As I got to about the age of four, I knew that something was different about me. And that's when I finally started to realize that as I look back, that age was where I could identify that I was experiencing same sex attraction. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So with those two massive things on board and in the home that I was being raised in as these, I affectionately call them religion wars because my, my mother came to her senses when a neighborhood lady had said, can I take your voice to Bible school and to the Baptist church? And mom didn't care. She says, oh yeah, whatever. Then the pastor asked my mother when I was gonna be baptized <laugh>. And, uh, and your

Speaker 1 00:04:28 Mother, you say, was a latter day saint

Speaker 2 00:04:30 Was a latter day saint. And, uh, it seems that overnight we were going to both the Catholic mass and also we were going to, my brother and I were going with my mother to primary to Sunday school to sacrament meeting. She was teaching in primary and all of these things. It was like, it happened so rapidly that there was a rebirth in her life and in my father's life. That really created a challenge from that point on for my brother and I to make some decisions. And so, missionary discussions at seven of those mother Superior at the convent taught us seven lessons on catechism. Yeah. And my brother and I at, you know, I was 11 where we were left to make the decision, which church are you going to align yourself with.

Speaker 1 00:05:18 Oh, wow. And that was on you? Yeah. Yeah. That was on me. Your parents weren't making that for you?

Speaker 2 00:05:22 No, no. Uhuh. But they were, there was politics and <laugh> and <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:05:26 There's some encouragement one way or the other.

Speaker 2 00:05:29 There was some strong, yeah, there was some very strong agendas. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:05:34 So it sounds like, I mean, you're both on an emotional level. Mm-Hmm. A family level, a religious level. Like it's just sort of all over the place for good or bad. I mean, that's just sort of the, the environment that you grow up in. Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:05:47 And you know, even though my brother was the first to decide to join the church, I came trailing about a year later. And I had initially not wanted my family, my to be, you know, divided unevenly, if you will, uh, religiously. And so I, I was very much so intrigued with the Catholic church because I had also been studying music since I was eight years old. I had this propensity for feeling deeply spiritual things in general, but the music of the Catholic church really, and the pageantry, all of that just really took me. So when the sound of Music came out 50 years ago, and I was sitting there in the theater as a little boy, and all of a sudden here's this massive organ processional that starts playing as Maria is processing down the aisle of this Catholic church. The automatic feeling was, I gotta be a Catholic

Speaker 1 00:06:41 <laugh>. I was calling to you. Right. Yeah. It was just calling

Speaker 2 00:06:44 To me. And then, you know, by the time I was 11, I'd kind of come to my senses and saw what was going on and Gotcha. As much as I could as an 11-year-old. Yeah. But the decision I had to, I had to fight for my connection with the church on more than one occasion and have in my life. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So, you know, my, my focus now is the church and the gospel, and I just keep moving in this direction. Yeah. You know, moving forward,

Speaker 1 00:07:15 And obviously this, you know, these parts of your life deserve several hours of podcasting, but I would imagine that, you know, you're going through your teenage years, you're reconciling your sexuality to some extent there. And then even in the church and then being single, then it comes time for, you know, the marriage ages. And, uh, did you serve a mission? Oh yeah. You didn't, right. So you went through all these things and it was, uh, was it sort of all over the map as far as where, how you were reconciling all this with, with these things that you had going on inside?

Speaker 2 00:07:43 Yeah, that's, that's a really, that's a really strong question. I knew that, that inside of me, that I needed to move in this direction, but I moved forward not because of what I knew as far

Speaker 1 00:07:57 As the direction of the church, or Yes,

Speaker 2 00:07:58 Uhhuh <affirmative>. I moved forward because this gift of faith had been given to me. And I believe very strongly that the vast majority of gifts of the spirit always come in a raw form. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And because they do, there is a lot of developmental effort that we have to exert ourselves with in order to develop these gifts. And faith was moving at a very rapid speed for me. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And no matter what I was facing, what I considered to be, what I would bear in as immortal, I couldn't abandon where my faith was taking me. It didn't mean that I was not without my struggles. It, what it meant was, is that this was the central energy in my life that was moving me forward more and more. Yeah. And it was drawing me as quickly as I could muster the strength to keep up a decent pace with it. And it's continued to this day Yeah. To move me in that direction.

Speaker 1 00:08:58 So as you, I, and I appreciate, I framed that like you knew you couldn't abandon your faith, but in doing that, like this is the, the paradox of it all. Did you feel like you had to abandon your sexuality to some extent by doing that? Or I, I mean, were they playing at odds, or how would you describe it in your personal experience?

Speaker 2 00:09:12 Yeah, playing it, playing at odds is the, is the right way to say it, because there was real pain that I was experiencing because I had been raised at a time in the church when the agenda was very, very strong. It is a celibate life. And that meant in thought in word and indeed.

Speaker 1 00:09:33 And you don't talk about these things. No.

Speaker 2 00:09:34 Right? No. Oh, heaven's not.

Speaker 1 00:09:36 You just gotta bury it deeper and deeper. Yeah. Which is not a, a positive recipe,

Speaker 2 00:09:40 <laugh>. No, it's not. And, uh, you know, and I, and I knew that once I started to share what I had been experiencing with, you know, local church leadership, and that didn't occur until I got home from my mission. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> from the Philippines. I had talked to my mission president that I knew was, you know, he was a, had therapist background. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And he was wonderful about it. I only had a know three, two or three months left with him. 'cause he was new, but he gave me some courage to move forward. But when I got home and I went in to talk to my bishop about it, the reception was far from what it had been with my mission president. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> the reception was, I need you to give me your temple recommend. And then reached into his desk, pulled out the general handbook of instructions and said, I don't know what to do with you. Wow. So that seemed to be probably the low place where we started to build from. And I didn't ever feel that I needed to go to press with, oh no. I'm quote unquote experiencing same sex attraction. I'm gay. I'm, you know, I, I never felt that that was going to accomplish anything for me. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:10:50 Like, as far as making it super public and just being out there. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:10:53 Any more than I would make public my terrible struggle with anxiety. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So, you know, Kurt, the way that I formulated this in my mind, and I

may be totally off base with this, but when I studied the Book of Mormon for the umpteenth time, and I, I got to ether 1227, that's when I started to realize what the role of mortality would consist of in terms of what God said, our weakness. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> is weakness. It's a state of being rather than a list of, you know, here's all these things that you're gonna have problems with. What it became was God said, if you come to me, I will show unto you your weakness, this state of being. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And I give you, okay. There's another thing. God gives us good things. He doesn't give us bad things. So if he gave this to me, and this is one of the things that comprises my state of being weak, then I believed that I needed to learn what this was about.

Speaker 2 00:11:55 And I needed to learn what he wanted me personally to do with this. Even though there was a lot of people with a lot of opinions and a lot of leadership in other areas in the church that was ver, that were very, very direct about. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> things should be, yeah. Should be navigated. So I didn't want to, I mean, I was, this was getting worse. The intensity of it was getting real, real difficult to bear. But I just had faith that I wanted to know what God wanted from me. I wanted to know, how is I gonna deal with this? Because God doesn't take these aspects of weakness in my life. He never took this and said, I'm gonna make this a strength. Now, what he said was, I'm going to make you strong in this weakness, but I can't take this away because it's the very thing that will keep you close to me.

Speaker 2 00:12:43 Yeah. And if I take it away, you don't have much of a chance, Jim. So hold on. I'm not gonna abandon you. This will get messy. But I'm not gonna abandon you. I'm gonna stay with you and I'll move you through this, because this is what I, I believe, and this may be heresy to some of your listeners, <laugh>, I don't believe I experienced SSA in my premortal existence. And I don't believe I will be experiencing it in my postmortal experience. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, I just don't believe that this is where the proving ground is. This is the test drive for me. And so it doesn't make it easier, but it makes it more meaningful. And my faith just teaches me something different. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:13:23 I think this, you know, ether 1227 is such a helpful frame in this, how you've unpacked it. 'cause sometimes we maybe look at that verse a little too superficial, and sometimes we put s at the end weaknesses. Right. That God gave us weaknesses. Then we assume like, well, God gave, you know, Jim anxiety and same-sex attraction, and these are weaknesses that he needs to deal with. But I love that it's a singular, and it's sort of a synonymous with God gave us mortality and that it's not a positive thing, nor does it a negative thing. It's a thing that in, it's like an arena in which we can stand, that God can work with us. Right. And that we can reconcile whatever that weakness, whatever that mortality offers us to become something stronger. That's really helpful. 'cause I think some people worry that I don't wanna label, you know, same sex attraction as like, this is a bad thing. Let's, like, let's not talk about it, bury that, nor do I wanna talk about it. Like, isn't it wonderful? Like, you know, triple down on that and you know, 'cause there's, but to frame as God gave us weakness, God gave us mortality and to make us strong,

Speaker 2 00:14:24 It's powerful. And if this very thing is what is going to make me more like Jesus, why do I wanna fight it? Yeah. Why do I wanna abandon it? And yet I don't want to move

with this aspect of weakness into an area where I start fighting against him. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Or it takes me more, it takes me further away from these very sensitive feelings, spiritual feelings that, that he reserves for those who are sincerely trying to navigate what he understands absolutely. Perfectly. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know, I, there are those who struggle with the idea of love, and they have labeled God as a God who loves us unconditionally. I've never seen that in the scriptures. What I have seen is he has pure and perfect love for us. And I'm not tying anything else to that. I'm not tying anything like, well, therefore I get to, which seems to be what unconditional love has developed into. Therefore, I can do whatever I feel I need to do. And God's gonna love me no matter what. Yes he is. But I wanna develop the pure love of Christ. I wanna develop, what is this perfect love that he says, this is gonna cast out all fear in your life, and this is also going to make you like me. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But it's going to require every ounce of energy that you possess to develop this. Yeah. There's another gift. It's what he does. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:15:57 Yeah. And we surrender that to him. You know, that's exactly, this is the journey. It's gonna be maybe hard, but it's worth that journey to go on. Right. So maybe let's just, I'll, I appreciate all these principles you've unpacked here. I just want to again, sort of re step back and regroup in terms of like, what is a leadership audience to do with all of this? Because the last thing I wanna do is, and, and I tried to avoid this with all these LGBT Saints, uh, interviews and presentations, is I don't want to present like, well, here's Jim <laugh>, let's, here's Jim's formula. Just tell everybody to do what Jim did, <laugh>, and they'll be fine. Right. Because that's not helpful. And so yeah. Like, considering all these things, what would you say if you're speaking to church leaders, like how can they use this or maybe gain a perspective with this information?

Speaker 2 00:16:42 Uh, that's really great. So here's my take. I, as somebody who experiences same sex attraction, who's experienced terrible anxiety and who has been single for going on 68 years of my life.

Speaker 1 00:16:56 Yeah. Never married,

Speaker 2 00:16:57 Right. Never married. I'm not supposed to be exposed to leadership opportunities. Hmm. Now I'm sorry, but that's kind of the

Speaker 1 00:17:06 Point. Not that that's written anywhere's not, but that's sort of the cultural moral.

Speaker 2 00:17:09 That's, that's the

Speaker 1 00:17:09 Cultural. And you felt that throughout your adult life? Oh,

Speaker 2 00:17:12 I have felt this all my life. Hmm. You know, the day I was bab I was baptized on a Saturday, I was confirmed on a Sunday at church in the morning, I was given the onic priesthood, I was ordained a deacon, and I was set apart as the secretary in the deacon's quorum presidency. That all happened within a 24 hour period of time. Oh, wow. <laugh>. Yeah. And little did I know that that was going to turn out to be momentum. So let me just share

something because I believe, I believe so deeply in the joy and the beauty that comes when God steps into our lives and says, I don't care what condition you're in, I'm going to use you. Hmm. And that's what he did with Alma Jr. If you'll forgive me, the Yeah, yeah. Uh, the title there. But that's what he did with Alma Jr.

Speaker 2 00:18:02 That's what he did with so many other people. And the Book of Mormon is filled with these kinds of things. And so are the scriptures. I mean, his original 12. Yeah. So my point is, is that in the mission field, I was made a group leader, which now would be a branch president. I was a counselor in two branch presidencies after I got home at the missionary training center where I worked, I was a counselor in Num and Secretary numerous times in Elders Quorum presidencies. I was a counselor in the Bishop Rick. I've had, this is, I'm on my fourth tour of duty as a high counselor. And at my third stake experience, I've been a music director, a choir director. I've been a guest organist on Temple Square. I've been a member of the Tabernacle Choir. I have had numerous assignments on a general level with the church, bringing choirs to general conference, being a member of the church music committee and other assignments that they've given to me.

Speaker 2 00:18:56 Now, I look back and I say, I've had to do this with my state of weakness. Hmm. Has this given me insight. I mean, by educational training and by my own experience, I am a clinical social worker. I'm licensed as a certified social worker. I've done a lot of therapy in my life with people. Do I have a formula, do this and this? Then this is the outcome. I don't do formulas. I never have Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> because we're too different. I mean, there isn't one person in the billions that are on the earth. That's even the same. Our experiences are all different. Yeah. And because of that, I feel that I have to be real careful with never feeling as though I've been there, done that in anything that I do in with church leadership. Hmm. Being a leader in the church, what I always say is, you know what, that was experience at that particular time. This is a new time. Hmm. And I may have a bit of a point of reference or a frame, you know, of reference, but this is new. Yeah. I wasn't me then. I'm me now. Yeah. So knowing that, and knowing, you know, being a leader, you don't have to have the answers, but you have to have is the love. And you have to have the humility to let God help you, help the person sitting across from you or who is coming to you in incredible agony. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:20:31 So, and it sounds like you had, when you were given these opportunities to serve in these variety of callings, and it was a, a blessing to you to have those experiences along the way, but there's also experiences you kind of felt like they're not being offered to me because of my state of matrimony or whatever it is

Speaker 2 00:20:49 That thought actually came, you know? Yeah. I mean, I, I would think through, you know, that would pop into my head like any normal human being. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But I, my immediate response to that was, do I want it, I mean,

Speaker 1 00:21:02 As far as like a calling or a, like a service

Speaker 2 00:21:04 Opportunity. I don't wanna be a bishop. Why would I wanna do that? <laugh>?

Speaker 1 00:21:06 Oh, that's pretty fun. You know?

Speaker 2 00:21:08 Yeah. <laugh>, I actually look at the situation and I say, no, I, and if I'm not equipped for that, I'm not equipped for that. God's going to give me all I need to get home to him. And if that's not included in it, I don't necessarily want to go after it. Right.

Speaker 1 00:21:23 So what I'm like picking up from just sort of reflecting on this experience you've had, is that like, for a leader, to see an individual, like maybe that it's on a similar path as, as Jim, of saying like, I'm not gonna wait till Jim comes around and joins the, the common path, but I'm gonna figure out how I can use him as much as possible because it's in these service opportunities. Well, where he'll be blessed, I'll be blessed. The community will be blessed. Is that

Speaker 2 00:21:50 You picking up That's, that's exactly it. This morning, as I was thinking more about the, you know, the actual outline today, there was a very strong thought that came to me. And that was Morro I 10, three and four. Because that formula that Marna gave to us is not a formula to merely know that the Book of Mormon is true or not. What that is, is a formula that we ought to be using when we are trying to figure out who gets what calling, who gets what responsibility, who gets what assignments. We get it, we think about it. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, the pondering aspect is absolutely essential. 'cause that's where the revelation starts to come. And then the prayer is confirmation. It's not, I'm going to go ask God what God, you know? No, no. It's the revelation. The power comes when we're really in the deep throes of pondering.

Speaker 2 00:22:38 And so that's one of the things that I, I, I really do find is extremely helpful in, as a leader. And, you know, I, I just have to tell you this, when I was called to the bishop, Rick, that shocked me more than anything. I didn't even think I, I mean what on earth. And the bishop was a very successful businessman. And he said to me, what is your counsel to me in order for me to become a successful bishop? And I said, well, this is my counsel. Take it for what it's worth, if you bring your skillset as a successful businessman into this environment, you'll find that you'll do more damage to the members than you will. Good. Because the two, while you think that that business skillset is really valuable as an administrator, they don't need administrators. They don't need managers. What the saints need are those who are on the same level and will love them and listen to them and serve them. And that's very different than what's in the business environment. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know, it's not what they're, that's just not the training. And so I, I think about this, you know,

Speaker 1 00:23:50 And I, and I'm just, I can't help but go back to that Yeah. Experience you had with that bishop where he said, I don't know what to do with you. Like that, that's a very administrative, like, this is a problem. Your problem here at my desk, I don't know how to get this problem off my desk. <laugh>. You know? And, and so, and I appreciate like that approach of just maybe holding back that administrative focus. 'cause there are moments, you know, you're, there's administrative component to being a church leader, but you don't have to do that with every individual and especially somebody with your life journey. You don't want to be administered to. You wanna be ministered to. Right. That's right. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:24:26 And I, I love that differentiation because, you know, I had a person that I greatly, greatly respected. And I to this day, love this gentleman who was, uh, a tremendous leader in the church. And he told me one time, we both had a common friend, and he said to me, you know, the concern I have about this individual is that he does not take counsel. And I thought to myself, because I had been working at the time with this general authority, I thought to myself, I never want that said about me. So it completely opened up a whole new arena in my mind, because if I was going to be a leader, I needed to be taking counsel from those that I was leading and never feel that I had all the answers. 'cause I, you know, that's not the point. That's why councils are so vital in the church. So incredibly

Speaker 1 00:25:23 Important. Yeah. So I feel like we've, you know, just during your sort of your adult journey as a single member of the church, you've had different opportunities. Maybe others you felt like were passed over, even maybe for more official reasons, but some for just cultural reasons. Anything else, like as you look back at your journey, like is there anything else that comes to mind that would be helpful for a church leadership audience to better understand about Jim's experience, which is just Jim's experience, but we're, that's what we're exploring today.

Speaker 2 00:25:53 Well, I think that it's valuable that any leader in the church understand that the individuals that they are leading belong to Jesus Christ. They don't belong to the church. They have membership in the church. But to feel as though the tight fit that they can have with Jesus Christ is the same tight fit that they should have in the church. It's a misnomer. Hmm. I mean, it's so yes. And what that means is, while I have membership, that means that I can glean everything that the church has to offer. And it is rich, and yes, it is the kingdom of God on earth. But I also understand that Jesus has his, I really believe that Jesus gets frustrated just like he did in the scriptures with things that would go on. We read about that, that, and I don't think that everything that happens with leaders in the church, honestly are the savior's will and what he would intend to have happen.

Speaker 2 00:26:52 I was very frustrated one day. I had been overcome and overwhelmed by problems that had reared their head in, um, in my employment at the university. I didn't know which direction I could go with how I was going to resolve this issue that had been really placed squarely on my shoulders because there wasn't going to be a good outcome no matter what I did. And I was just deep in thought one day sitting at my desk and all of a sudden, a very strong voice. Now a very strong impression as though it was a voice came to me and it said, Jim, you have to remember that my atonement also includes the sins of the church. Hmm. That changed everything, the perspective I had about the problem, the way that I could see to move forward with other things. It's not an affront. We're mortals trying to navigate a very treacherous world, and we're doing the very, very best that we can.

Speaker 2 00:27:56 And we're gonna make mistakes. And they make mistakes from the top down because mortals don't get it, <laugh>. We just don't have the vision that Jesus has <laugh> and he's trying. Yeah. We're trying. We're doing the very, very best we can. Yeah. So it doesn't mean that I don't sustain by all means. We sustain and we move forward because that's what our faith can teach us. Yeah. And if things happen that aren't so great, it's gonna be okay.

Now for a bishop or a stake president, we just have to do the best we can. And yeah. We're gonna make mistakes. And there is such a thing as saying, okay, I learned my lesson. I've gotta change that attitude, or I need to change that behavior. We need to realize that we'll be doing a lot of changing while we're serving. Yeah. That's so important to me.

Speaker 1 00:28:44 No, I love this concept of thinking about it as far as like the church and what is the church. And in church leadership, it's easy to sort of, sort of conflate those worlds and or make 'em synonymous. The church is Jesus and Jesus is the church. Right. And of course, we have a deep respect for the church. I do as well. I love it. And so, but sometimes it's hard when people say, well, what do you mean, Jim, though the church has sin? You know, and it sort of take us back a little bit, but this reminded me, I was reading in the, in the Church handbook just the other day, and in section 1.3, it's, which is titled The Purpose of the Church. I love how this is phrased, says Jesus Christ established his church to enable individuals and families to assist God in fulfilling his work and salvation and exaltation.

Speaker 1 00:29:28 And it was so pointed to me that it didn't say that the church represents God in all fulfilling his work. And at the end of the day, and, and this could be maybe controversial opinion, but we're in good company here, Jim. So yes, <laugh>, uh, <laugh>. But like, does God need the church? Does Jesus need the church at the end of the day? I mean, we're talking about like powerful beings. So we could come just like everybody's, everybody's saved. The work is done. We did it all. It's done. But it's such a beautiful framework that they have established this entity, this institution, that we can all step into and say, and God looks at us, says, Hey, can you help me out? Because it's such a sanctifying process and I don't, so does God need the church? I guess the short answer is no. Does he need the church to sanctify his children?

Speaker 1 00:30:17 Yeah. Just like he needs mortality. He couldn't do this. And I often make, you know, why do we leave God's presence if the point was just to return to God's presence? We left God's presence to come here, to be sanctified. And the church is a beautiful body that does that. With that said, it's okay to recognize, ah, you know what, there are moments that moment when the way that Jim was treated in that bishop's office with what that bishop said, that wasn't right. And that was hurtful. And that was a form of sin in that moment. Maybe that bishop turned away from God because 'cause of naivete of he didn't understand whatever it is, but recognized that there was hurt there and Christ even heals that hurt. Absolutely. It's a really powerful concept. And, and one that's not, you know, in unorthodox to any degree, it's okay to recognize the church for what it is and that we're here to assist it.

Speaker 2 00:31:07 Yeah. You know, my grandfather was, um, he was a cowboy from Montana and he had a saying where, and I agreed with him, we all have opinions. They're like feet, you know,

Speaker 1 00:31:19 <laugh>, and they all stink. Right. And they

Speaker 2 00:31:20 All stink. Yeah. And the reality, the reality of what you're saying is, I love the church to the point that I'm not concerned about having opinions about everything that goes

on. And I have to say that if, if a bishop or a stake president will be vigilant about those who, those members who are showing signs of putting into executing, if you will, their exit strategy. Hmm. This is what I see happening around a lot.

Speaker 1 00:31:50 Now, what do you mean by exit strategy?

Speaker 2 00:31:52 There are those who, who say, I have in the back of my mind the straw that will break the camel's back. Hmm. And that to me is they're waiting

Speaker 1 00:32:02 Like the minute I show up on Sunday and that that thing is there, that dynamic is happening, I'm done.

Speaker 2 00:32:07 Right. Or if there is too much of a certain dynamic that continues to rear its head, and I am one who do, does believe that for some they need to unplug from the church in order to plug back in, in a more fit, secure way. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Now you say, why do, why would I draw that kind of a conclusion? Well, I believe that, that Jesus has given his authority and his keys to this church. I believe that the ordinances are absolutely essential for our salvation. Those ordinances cannot be provided by any other religious organization on this earth. They do not have what this church has. Now knowing that my faith is strengthened, because guess what, even at the temple, there are people who make mistakes, who sin, who are doing things that the reality is this is all God has to get his work done.

Speaker 2 00:33:03 And he's okay with it because his atonement is covering it all. He's able to have this church on the earth because of that atoning sacrifice. And it was the same way as he was prepping things to get underway. And training then comes his atoning sacrifice, then he returns and he gets it on the road. He had to get Peter back on the road because Peter was depressed as all get out after all that had transpired during that atoning sacrifice. And I believe that I don't need to have an opinion about where the church is going. And I don't need to have an opinion about I'm along for this ride. The church is the vehicle to get me where I need to be, but I am the one who's made the personal choice to get into the car and to go with wherever this is, wherever this right.

Speaker 2 00:33:53 Is taking me with open eyes, open heart. And yes, I'm not gonna agree with every road that is gonna get taken. It's okay. But I just have faith in the driver. Yeah. And Jesus is there. He's the one that's taking care of all this. So why do we have to, why do we need to put ourselves into this execution of an exit strategy or whatever it may be? I mean, that's kind of tough language to use, but I, I'm not at fault with anyone because at one point in my life, I had to fight to stay in the church. And it was a brutal fight. I talk about it in the book that I wrote. Hmm. And I don't need to bring it up here. But it was very real to me. It was very painful to me. Probably one of the most exquisitely painful things I'd ever experienced in my life.

Speaker 2 00:34:42 But what it has done for me as a result, has left me in a position to be so much more compassionate with people and so much more loving of people no matter where they're at. I just try to be as kind and loving because God wants us to develop three things. He wants us to change to become like his son. He wants us to develop pure and perfect love. And

he wants us to be forgiving. Those are the three things that he said this in conjunction with, the covenants you make with me are gonna get you home. And heaven knows I don't want to be anywhere else. I don't want to be back here again. <laugh>. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, and, and it's hard because sometimes, you know, we're, we're our best enemy. We're always, we're critical, not only of things external, but we're critical of things internal.

Speaker 2 00:35:27 Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. You know, the world is turning into a victim world more and more victims all the time. And people who believe that everything that happens just proves that they're a victim. But I, I like to ask the question people who say that to me, you know, do you understand that you're a victim of your own choices? Because they don't like that idea. Yeah. They want everything to be everybody else is doing. Yeah. And you know, it makes it easier on their accountability, which means they don't have any. And so I try to encourage people, no, no, no, just work with the Lord. Get this relationship where it needs to be so that you feel a tight fit belonging to him. Yeah. That's where it's at. That's what we have to do.

Speaker 1 00:36:09 Again, I just appreciate this. I think this is really helpful for leaders to process as far as like just seeing the church as what it is for both you as the leader and for the individual. And you know, you talk about how some people need to unplug. Like, and this is really uncomfortable terrain a little bit. 'cause we don't want anybody to feel like they need to unplug from the church. And as a leader, we sometimes have this reflex of, well, let's give them three servings of church and, and 10 servings of temple of tenant until they figure out that this is actually good. But when somebody has an incorrect framing of the church, whether that was, you know, external issues or internal issues like you said, that whether they were that victim or whether they misunderstood something and they framed it wrong. Just to have the faith of saying like, if you need to unplug, we'll be right here when you're ready to come.

Speaker 1 00:37:01 And I, and I sometimes, whether I'm right or wrong, when I see loved ones, you know, leave the church as we frame it, I often say they're not leaving the church. They're just in one big reset. They just need a reset. 'cause how they were seeing the church as I talked with them, I'm thinking like, I don't think we go to the same church like this is, we're in different worlds. Like, that's their reality for them. And so I'm thinking, well, you can't just push through that. You have to completely reset your system. And if that means you need to step away for a while, we're right here ready when you come back and, and you know, then putting that savior dynamic or putting the savior into it all, I just, and I'm probably, you know, putting more to these Bible stories than there is.

Speaker 1 00:37:41 But, you know, sometimes Christ went to the synagogue to engage with his people, his covenant people there. Sometimes he ate with the sinners outside the synagogues. And does that mean he condoned their actions? No. But he was willing to go wherever they were at and minister to them until they were ready to return to his church. You know? So I think there's, there's so much nuance there and it, but it's worth like sitting with as a leader and being like, you know, that's okay. But, and I appreciate from your side, just you sort of going on this journey where you had to come to terms with what the church was for you. That it did cause you some hurt from time to time, maybe a lot of hurt, but that doesn't mean you

need to run away or be bitter or, and I'm sure there were moments where that you experienced that.

Speaker 2 00:38:22 So here, here's my question because I feel hurt in my family. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> do I say, I'm leaving you, I never wanna see you again. I mean, what is this accomplishing? Yeah. Because relationships are the most important thing that we can develop with one another. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. That's where the love and the forgiveness and the changing to be like Christ comes into play. Yeah. You know, I think we've become immune and we've become disenchanted with the word repentance. Hmm. So whenever I see that word, I reframe it in my mind as I read the scriptures. And that is change to become like Jesus. Hmm. Am I willing to change? That's a burden. Am I willing to change that mess that I've created or this behavior that is bringing me untold amounts of pain? Am I willing to make a change with this? And Asama was teaching about this whole concept of being born again.

Speaker 2 00:39:15 Well, lemme tell you something. There's a lot of agency in being born. Hmm. There was agency that was used on the other side to be born here. There was agency that is used here to be born again. And we must give this agency due respect. This leads me to a, I keep getting a nuts that I need to, to bring up this thought. I have met a certain percentage of people in my life that have sought after leadership in the church. I have noticed unbelievable behavior. I have noticed what I call mastering upper impression management so that they can <laugh> is that technical term, is that fall in favor with whomever makes what they think is the decision. I have seen those who have just thirsted after what they perceive is ecclesiastical privilege and power. Mm-Hmm mm-Hmm. <affirmative> now. And I've seen that on, on too many occasions.

Speaker 2 00:40:16 I believe that when Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ said that this is my work and my glory, it was put in that order for a reason. They didn't say It's my glory and my work, by the way. They said, it's my work first, and this is the work that they do. And they share it with us just like you so beautifully pointed out. But I really feel deeply inside that we come into any calling that we are given in the church. Not because we get to play a role, not because we have this history of watching people do whatever they're, you know, okay, what does it take to be a bishop? Oh, well, a bishop does this and the stake president does this. And if you're a high counselor, you do this. And you know, by the way, the high counselors have a bad rap because, you know, they're guaranteed.

Speaker 2 00:41:01 They speak generally once a month and, you know, anesthetize the whole congregation because that's what they do. You know, Uhhuh <affirmative>, you, you get all this kind of craziness because of the culture. Uhhuh <affirmative>. But I, I came to learn a long time ago that heavenly Father will use us and he knows what to do with us. And he said, I know where you are with your gifts. I know with you where you are with your weakness and what constitutes your weakness. I know where you're at with your faith. I need you where you are at with those things right now. And I'm going to give you some work to do. It's not gonna be for long, but don't walk into this thinking that you have a pride born of experience. 'cause that's gonna destroy everything. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> that's a type of pride that I have experienced

in my own life that I learned a terrible lesson about pride, born of experience doesn't qualify us for anything.

Speaker 2 00:41:55 It makes whatever we're called to do worse. We can't say, well, I've been a bishop, or I've been a relief study president, or gosh, I was, you know, I, I served in this capacity. I know this already. I don't, 'cause it causes us to do one of two things. Either we know it all or we say, you know, been there, done that. Yeah. And I love Jesus, his approach to us. He never says it because of his atoning sacrifice. He never has once said, ever been there, done that. He has said, me too. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And right here. Yeah. You know this me too. Yeah. So that kind of an approach from a savior. And he's all about us getting home, getting through this experience here, which is so terribly overwhelming to us. So knowing that I take, I try to take that approach whenever a calling comes.

Speaker 2 00:42:45 There's a, I'm reminded of something that a dear friend wrote to me many, many years ago. And, uh, he, he couldn't have been more exacting in the, in what he told me. And it was a gift that he gave me on my birthday, just a, a letter. And it wasn't very long. And this is what he said. Can I, is that okay if I share this Please? He said it's really quite amazing to me just how tricky life is sometimes in order to teach us its necessary lessons, which very greatly, of course, in terms of difficulty and painfulness, I can often recognize how so many writers have come to cynically, describe life as some prodigious gesture hurling us, a constant barrage of experiences filled with subtle mockery and painful irony. Yet I yearn for the day of my understanding when the wise and where force will make sense and only hope for some additional time in life after that day, to be able to live life in accordance with such an understanding to prove even if only to myself, that I can make the good choice.

Speaker 2 00:43:49 When I understand the choices, until that day comes for each of us, we do the best we can. We hold fast to all that is authentically beautiful, uplifting and spiring. We heard our wild doubts and ferocious castigation of self into some safe corral. And we hope for courage to dispel anger, suspicion, and ranker. So we might learn from life's lessons however painful. Wow. Isn't that powerful? That is super powerful. And I love the fact that I have, uh, I relate to this on a very deep basis. And again, anybody who chooses to pick up the book or download the, uh, the audible version, we'll see that this journey that I've been on is a journey that has been strictly mine. It is not a standard. It is not for somebody to say, well, to quote me and to, to say, well, he says, this is how your life is.

Speaker 2 00:44:50 No, no, this is my life. And by the way, the fact that I have shared what I have, my experience with leaders, and that's in this book, my experience in my own religious struggles, et cetera, all of that has been very powerful to me. And it's, it's in this book to show me that this journey that I've been through in mortality is going to serve me very, very well in the next estate. And I'm okay with it serving its purpose, even though it's a tough purpose to be, you know, at times it's very, very difficult. I am committed to the gospel. I am committed to the kingdom of God on earth, which is the church I'm committed to the leadership of the church. I'm committed to me. And I'm committed to the fact that all of it is in a very fragile condition. And it's going to be a challenge for me and others moving forward. But we move forward. We don't stop moving forward. We have to keep going. Yeah. And there's great happiness and reason to do

so. There's, there's real reason. And the spirit's with us just, we keep just keep going. Don't stop, keep going. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:46:03 I've just so much appreciated, like having this discussion about life experiences that are quite complex, that are sometimes difficult and in different seasons of life. And to use your life experience just as a backdrop and say, let's just explore where the journey Jim's been on regardless. And I mean, you could take various clippings of this and even think this is an LGBT, you know, uh, conversation. But, and, and it's nothing. But I mean it's everything about that. And it's everything about, it's a conversation about mortality, about weakness that, uh, we find in, in ether. And so I'm, I've, the one question I have, 'cause I'm sure there's people if maybe, you know, return missionary Jim was return missionary Jim in 2023, you know, at 20 early twenties, someone may look at you and say, Jim, if you continue in this path of trying to stay in the church and whatnot, you, you'll never be happy

Speaker 2 00:46:55 Or

Speaker 1 00:46:56 Able to be a mistake. And now that with hindsight, here we are on, you know, at least you're in your second half of your life. What would you say to that if someone said that to you back then?

Speaker 2 00:47:07 Oh boy, that is a loaded question, <laugh>, because that's

Speaker 1 00:47:11 What we do here.

Speaker 2 00:47:11 <laugh>. I have had more than one person say to me, what are you gonna do when you get to the other side and find out that it was really okay with God to act out on your own sexual feelings or your own thoughts, et cetera, to the point to where you have a partner? Or are you married or whatever, you know, and you didn't take advantage of it. Well, my response has always been, I don't know what, what, what I will say if that was, was the case. But I know one thing I'm not gonna say is that I want to do over. Hmm. Because what I've experienced is generalized anxiety and SSA for more than 60 years of my life, and they have been my constant unfailing companions along this whole journey. I'm okay. I don't wanna look back and say, oh, mortality was absolutely and unquestionably the most fulfilling experience I have ever had in my entire life.

Speaker 2 00:48:09 <laugh>, I don't need that because eternity is going to be, I'm looking forward to what happens after. And you know what, I'm okay with whatever father and Jesus decide to do. Yeah. I'm not afraid of judgment day. I've done a lot of things that haven't been as wholesome and good as I should have been. This is me. And people say, well, you figured it all out. No, I haven't. I'm just telling people what I've experienced and what I would recommend. But five more years, 10 more years will definitely influence because I will be growing and progressing and moving forward. So again, that's why I go back and say I'm not a standard for anybody. I don't, I'm not saying that my life is a formula for one single soul. What I'm saying is if there's something that moves you, that I say, or that I have written and it resonates with you, then you go on it because it's resonating in you, not in me. Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's what I've

been and what I've experienced. So We'll keep moving. Is the battle still fierce? Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And there's new weapons all the time, you know, so true. We keep going. Yeah. Everybody's facing something with the same intensity. Everybody faces this intensity. It's the same thing. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:49:22 Well, any point principle concept that we didn't, I don't wanna make sure we hit or do

Speaker 2 00:49:27 We, we hit a lot. I <laugh> do

Speaker 1 00:49:28 We cover it at all?

Speaker 2 00:49:29 I hope you, when you edit this down, it's longer than 10 minutes. So

Speaker 1 00:49:33 <laugh>, I think I have plenty of work with you. So I, again, I've just appreciated exploring your life journey and seeing how it's made you a better disciple of Jesus Christ. Uh, the last question I have for you is, well let's first let me first ask if people do want to check out your book, what's the title? And we'll link to it in the show notes and all that, but Oh,

Speaker 2 00:49:49 That's great. Um, it's called To Belong to Him. It's, um, about 200 and, I don't know, 50 something, some odd pages. And it's through Amazon that you can get it. And Amazon Audible also has the recorded version that I did, and so it's my voice. Oh, cool. So now you really can <laugh>, you know, you can, you can really find all kinds of fault or whatever you want to and anything that you find, I just hope and pray that as you read through things, that there will be a feeling of this is his experience as opposed to have an opinion about it and being critical, et cetera. Yeah. We, we don't fashion our lives after being critical about Paul's life before he became an apostle. And we don't get critical about Alma's life before he became, you know, what he was, we're more concerned about what is this all about and what happened to them and where did they go? That was right. Yeah. So anyway. Awesome.

Speaker 1 00:50:41 And I would imagine it's a book that maybe a, a church leader could give to somebody who's on a similar life path, not as a model or just do what Jim did, but, uh, maybe they'd find deeper understanding and connection to the savior by hearing more of your story.

Speaker 2 00:50:54 Right. That's the whole point. Yeah. It's what belonging to him is about in my mind. Yeah. Love it. And there are those that are feeling that they're not alone, and that's all I care. Nice. I, this isn't about me as much as it is getting back to the savior.

Speaker 1 00:51:08 Love it. Last question I have for you is, I wanted you to maybe shift into the leadership experience you've had in life. You're currently on a stake high council and you've been in Bishop Ricks and things. How has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus

Speaker 2 00:51:20 Christ? Hmm. I'll tell you, really develop a deep sense of compassion, a deep sense of watching other people in the challenges and pain that they're going through as

leaders, because they don't have all these answers that everybody thinks they should. And I am a better follower of the savior because he's the one that we all should be following and we should be sustaining the leadership. Now. That's a conversation that we ought to be having with Jesus and with, you know, with our father in heaven, especially over how do I navigate this? You know, if there's a concern that we have, and I've navigated an awful lot, you know, 22 years working at the university and working with general authorities and general officers and working with all kinds of leadership on, on the campus, things didn't always go the way I thought they ought to go. And that's okay. Things still move along. We need to do the best that we can to love and support and forgive and make changes in our own lives, and stop demanding that everybody else make changes. You know, this is, we need to be changing and we make the greatest change when we see the greatest paradoxes. That's where the truth is at. Truth is in paradox, and that's where the savior wants us to learn from.

Speaker 1 00:52:47 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 leading-saints.org and actually leave a comment on the uh, episode page or reach out to us at leading-saints.org/contact. Remember, go to leading-saints.org/fourteen to hear the Packard family's experience of when loved ones leave the church.

Speaker 3 00:53:42 It came as a result of the position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by The God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the Declaration was made concerning the own and only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away, and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.