



So You've Been Called as Stake President: Now What?

March 9, 2024

Speaker 1 00:00:02 It is finally available. I've been working on a manuscript for the past four years, and it's finally a book I can hold in my hands. It's titled, is God Disappointed In Me Removing Shame From a Gospel of Grace? This book has gotten so much attention that it is already a number one Amazon bestseller. I'm Beyond amazed in just a few words I wrote, is God Disappointed in Me for Latter Day Saints who often feel overwhelmed by the gospel and who are constantly worrying if they are doing enough. It's for the Latter Day Saint who have stepped away from the church is for the individuals who appear to be living right but still can't find peace and happiness. And frankly, it's for everyone who enjoys listening to the Leading Saints podcast. You will love and cherish this book. Now, warning, you might want to consider purchasing multiple copies to share one Bishop who got an advance copy, read it in one weekend, and then literally purchased 100 additional copies. You can order it on Amazon. The link is in the show notes, or starting in March, you can find it in your local Costco in Idaho, Utah, and Arizona. It's called, is God Disappointed In Me and you can Order it. Now,

Speaker 1 00:01:20 I would be rude if I didn't take the time to explain to the newer listeners what Leading Saints is. Here it goes. Leading Saints is an organization that started as a hobby blog in 2010, and then really caught some traction in 2014 when the podcast started. We talk about all things leadership in the context of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latterday Saints. We aren't owned by the church, but we have a great relationship with them and always aim to be faith promoting even though we talk about the tough topics. My name is Kurt Francom. I'm generally the voice you hear as the host of the podcast. I've tried to get other hosts, but people demand my smooth tone and I really enjoy it. Check out leading saints.org to really get into the

weeds of what Leading Saints is and learn all about our mission to help Latter Day Saints be better prepared to lead.

Speaker 1 00:02:17 So you've been called as a stake president and now what? This is a series that I actually did through the newsletter that, uh, is actually quite popular on the, the Leading Saints platform. Every week, Tuesday or Wednesday, I send out a newsletter and just include a simple message in it, and it's actually become one of the more popular things on Leading Saints. And so if you're not subscribed to our newsletter, go to leading-saints.org and it'll pop up a box where you can put your email in and go there. Or just simply go to leading-saints.org/subscribe and, uh, put your email in and then you'll be sure to get our weekly emails where I share a leadership thought and we talk about any, anything and everything, whether it's how to run a meeting to some tips and tricks about being a stake president. Uh, we talk about it all.

Speaker 1 00:03:00 Now, for those of you that are new, maybe just came across this like, Hey, what's, what is this guy online? You know, just talking about, uh, being a stake president, you know, that's weird. Well, this is what we do at Leading Saints. We explore concepts, principles, dynamics in leadership, specific leadership callings, and here from the other guy that's done it right and understand what, how they approached it and things they did. And so the beauty of it is you can take it or leave it. Maybe there's an idea that I'll share here that you can absorb, put into practice and really benefit from, or you'll disagree with me in some areas. And that's fine, just as long as you know why you do the things you do, because this is the, this is the dynamic of leadership that we really want to push through through leading Saints, is that we don't claim to have the right answers, nor do we claim that any of our guests have the right answers.

Speaker 1 00:03:45 But it's all about intentionality. If we can be intentional as, as leaders and not just do what the last guy did or just do it because that's how you've always seen it done. But be intentional about your leadership and, uh, it will reach more people, bring more people to the gospel and to Jesus Christ. So many of you know, I served as a bishop in South Salt Lake for about five years, and I was coming to the end of my time and I remember the day that the, my stake president came into my office as, uh, randomly one Sunday and told me that he was actually being released, and it was sooner than expected and I was kind of put off guard. I thought, wow, I, I'm gonna experience this process of being a bishop and a new stake president called, I had no inclination that I would be involved in the next stake presidency.

Speaker 1 00:04:28 But, uh, went through the interview process, uh, a few weeks later, and lo and behold, I was called as the first counselor in the stake presidency in South Salt Lake. It was a remarkable experience that I really appreciate and I'm so glad I had the opportunity. It, I actually only served in the stake presidency for two years of the, the nine, uh, that that is expected. Uh, we just, uh, got two two packed into our condo <laugh> that we were living in, and so we moved outta that stake and was released. But during those two years, I got a new perspective about being in a stake presidency, kinda getting an idea of the things that the stake president deals with or a stake presidency deals with, putting together stake conferences and those types of things. And so I thought it would be fun just from my own personal experience.

Speaker 1 00:05:09 Again, you can take it or leave it of some tips that I would have for individuals starting in a stake presidency or even being a stake president. It might help you have a more positive experience and also help those in your stake, uh, have a more positive experiences with you as their leader. So here we go. I have a list of eight points and principles that I wanna discuss, and we'll go through each one of them and maybe by the end I'll have a bonus, one or two that I can share. Or in the midst of this, I'll, I'll tack on some, uh, additional principles and things. So the first principle for any new stake president out there is lead the leaders not the stake. Now that sounds weird. Let me explain. First of all, there's, I remember this pressure of going from a bishop role where I felt like I was, you know, in the trenches with the members.

Speaker 1 00:05:51 I was connecting on a personal level with so many in my ward. I, I knew the intimate problems of so many families in my ward and they were oftentimes relying on me or coming to me for counsel or perspective. And then I'm in the stake presidency and the feeling is that, well, it's just like being a bishop, but it's just sort of on a different scale. Then I felt overwhelmed here I am not just facing a ward of a couple hundred people, a stake of 5,000 plus people. And I at first had this pressure of I need to learn the names and get engaged with different families and visit them. And I soon became exhausted with this, with this desire because it was impossible. I'm only a man, I'm only immortal. I can't be a bishop to an entire stake. That's why they have each a bishop, right?

Speaker 1 00:06:39 So instead, I reframed my purpose through a lot of prayer and, and contemplation that I thought, well, maybe I can't be a bishop figure or a mentor to the entire stake and every individual in that stake, but I can be a leader, a mentor, a guide to the leaders in the stake. So when I visited a ward, I wasn't necessarily worried about shaking every hand in the, in the chapel and making sure every family knew me or that I knew them, but I did spend a little extra time with the bishop, with the bishop members, maybe members of the ward council, the Elco president. I got to know them, their, their family dynamics, their, their employment and and things like that so that I could connect with them and help them be the bishop to their portion of the stake. And it was such a more fulfilling, and I suddenly felt like I was in a calling I can actually do without this pressure of trying to lead and connect with 5,000 plus people.

Speaker 1 00:07:33 And this led to me taking just a quick moment, maybe stepping into a bishop's office, closing the door, sitting down and saying, Bishop, like, what are you losing sleep over? How can I help you? What perspectives or or what things are you struggling with that maybe I could add some perspective to, right? And we'd also make it fun. I remember a wonderful, uh, you know, we'd have these semi-regular bishop council meetings, right? And there's this one that we were, that was coming up and my stake president had a remarkable idea, said, you know what? Let's take all the bishops bowling. And so we sent out an email and we notified them that for this bishop's council, when you come, come in, you know, street clothes and just casual dress, and then we all piled into each other's cars and we drove down the street to the local bowling alley and we bowled for an hour.

Speaker 1 00:08:17 Now there's all this pressure as a stake presidency to get to the, get to the work, right? Like, what, what needs to be done? What activities are coming up? What

questions do you have? Let's handle the business at hand. However, it really shifted a dynamic when we could just take a week and go bowling with all the bishops in the stake. And we have awesome pictures of us all together at the bowling alley. And nobody knew that this was a group of bishops. We were just a, a group of brothers, you know, doing some bowling and that they felt like they could relax around us. They, they saw us more as, as mentors and friends, so that when we did get to the business, they were more open, they're more willing to lean in and share their, their authentic concerns with us because we had taken the time to get to know them on a really neutral playing field or a a, a more friendly playing field like the bowling alley.

Speaker 1 00:09:03 Alright, the next principle is to consider mandatory stake programs and themes, or one comment I received on this topic read like this, the problem with stake callings is that they call really good people to fill them. Really good people usually want to get really good things done so they plan and execute a bunch of really good things, leaving all the world leaders in their wake. So here's the thing, like I, I love how this is framed. If you're a brand new stake president, you're probably a pretty smart individual. You've probably got a lot of ideas, right? You've probably been a bishop before. We're in a bishop break, and you saw things that worked on that level. So why not bring it to the stake level, right? And then the temptation is, is great. You get in these council meetings and come a lot of ideas, and those ideas turn into programs or efforts or themes or, uh, or projects.

Speaker 1 00:09:49 So suddenly you may have this great idea of what if we got the entire stake together and index an entire stake as a stake, right? That'll build unity, right? Or we're gonna have this theme and we're gonna make sure the whole stake is focused on the theme. We'll present it in a stake conference, and then we'll tell all the bishops to work it into each one of their sacrament meetings. Now, this is tempting, right? However, for a lot of bishops or rewards, it can feel like, it can feel like micromanaging at times. Here I am a bishop doing my thing, and now the stake wants me to focus on this other thing. What about what I see or my perspectives or my themes that I wanna put in place? And then there can suddenly be this tension between the ward and the stake with this ambivalence as the bishop shows up to meet with the stake president, feeling like, uh, he's just gonna gimme a list of things I need to do or improve or tell me how to, how to run things on my ward.

Speaker 1 00:10:37 And so my encouragement from what I learned is figuring out how you best can get out of the way of the, the ward leaders and just simply be in that mentor role or in that encouraging role. So instead of coming up with a stake theme, maybe make sure the bishop knows, or the Bishop Ricks know how to come up with a war theme or the relief society presidents know how to do that, right? Anytime maybe that stake president walks into a meeting with ward leaders, he should be mumbling under his breath. How can I get out of their way? How can I get outta their way? I gotta figure this out. I don't want to be a bottleneck or the micromanager in these areas. Help them use their own keys to execute the work and to gather Israel in their own wards or to inspire in their own ways, through their own revelation.

Speaker 1 00:11:20 And you'll be seen as a mentor that they can turn to when they do run into problems or when they do need ideas, they're ready to ask you for them and open up to them. So really avoid these stake programs and themes that put too much pressure on the, on

the local wards, and they don't get a chance to execute their own vision on their own. All right? The third principle is how to lighten the load through over communication. Because here's what happens. The stake presidency can sometimes live in a really black box and nobody knows what's happening in that black box. Will they show up to my sacra meeting this Sunday? Like out of the blue? Or what person are they going to be pulling outta my ward into a stake calling? Are the ward goals and stake goals the same? Well, I don't know.

Speaker 1 00:12:00 I guess we'll find out at the next meeting. Sometimes the ward leaders don't know what's happening behind the curtain as far as what the stake leaders are doing. So the more you can communicate that, the better they'll have a heads up and be better service to you as the stake presidency and you'll be better service to them as the ward leaders. So really look for opportunities to over communicate. And here's one example of what that looks like. When we were serving in a stake presidency, we took time every week after or during our stake presidency meeting to start formulating an email that would go out to Bishop Ricks in the stake. And the first thing we covered in that email is where we would be on Sunday. So every ward, you got a heads up whether an individual in the stake presidency would be showing up in their ward.

Speaker 1 00:12:40 And bishops really appreciated this heads up. Now obviously there's some last minute changes and it didn't always happen like that. Or sometimes I, I did pop into a specific sacrament meeting that they weren't expecting me at, but they really appreciated just knowing where the stake presidency was headed. We would also communicate things in that email, like stake callings that we're trying to fill and ideas of individuals that, uh, we'd be open to who could feel that stake calling. And just knowing that certain callings were being vacated and assigned, and that really helped keep the bishops on the same page and not be surprised by certain callings. And we put in their upcoming activities, upcoming meetings, and really just information items that we could cover in an email so that the next time we met together, it didn't feel like a meeting that could have been a really good email, right?

Speaker 1 00:13:24 We've all been in those meetings. So don't save information for that next meeting. Just put it in an email that regularly goes out once a week and they'll be brought up to speed. And then by the time you get to those meetings, you can focus on more spiritual dynamics or questions and something that's really gonna feed the group rather than just downloading information in the context of a meeting. All the fourth principle, it may help some stake presidents out there is minimizing the targets. Now, let me explain this dynamic that you may be familiar with. A stake president every so often, every month or every quarter goes to what's called a coordinating council meeting. Right now that stake president walks there in there with a a, an area authority that's usually there, other stake presidents. And that area authority begins to download information to them, right?

Speaker 1 00:14:08 Maybe expectations, some things coming from the general authorities or church, and they lay it all out there for the bishop or for the stake presidents and the stake presidents are taking notes, right? So they walk stake, presidents walk outta that meeting with a whole bunch of targets, things that need to change, things that need to improve, and what do they do? They walk all those things metaphorically to the next bishop's meeting, right? And they

download all this, they dump it all on the bishops, all these things that need to happen. And then typically those bishops take that and they go to their ward council and dump all this information that needs to happen right now. I don't wanna minimize the importance of a lot of these things that may be happening in a, a coordinating council meeting. And I'm sure they, there's, they're very important to some extent.

Speaker 1 00:14:48 However, as a leader, you cannot overwhelm your people, right? Especially in a church setting where the church isn't built to overwhelm people. The church is built to bless people, lead 'em to the covenant path and to covenants that will bless their life. It's overwhelmed that the stake president fills from the coordinating council and dumping it downstream to the other leaders. It just stimulates more and more overwhelm, and then that overwhelm will spill over to the culture of your ward, to the point that even ward members feel overwhelmed. They don't feel redemption when they attend church. They just feel like there's more and more to do and to get done. So it takes a very mature leader, even at that stake presidency level, to gather these targets that you've been given and say, we can't do it all. However, we'll focus on the ones that are in line with our vision, our purpose, and what we're trying to do.

Speaker 1 00:15:34 And those ones, I'll be very intentional of passing them on to bishops and to then pass them on to the rewards. If you overwhelm your leaders, you're going to have an overwhelm stake, and that's no bueno. Now, for stake president, this may lead to some awkward conversations with an area authority who really wants them to pass around these targets. But this is the crucial reason for vision in a ward. It has to fit your vision. We cannot overwhelm people in this regard. All right? The fifth principle is a little bit outside the norm, and it is called shepherding the lost. One thing that stake presidents or stake presidencies engage with is those who maybe have been, who've lost their membership or who've gone through some type of membership council in the repentance process. Now, these membership councils often can kind of feel like just one more thing on the list of things to do, right?

Speaker 1 00:16:21 We're we're dealing with individuals who are maybe feeling rejected from their church or rejected from their faith community. And we, it needs to be handled really intentionally, right? And I no doubt there's stake leaders across the world who do a remarkable job at this. However, I've heard from too many people that once an individual who has lost their membership, they kind of feel like they're put on the back burner or the membership council led to this result, and that will last for 12 months. And so let's check in from time to time and just see how you're doing. However, nobody else in the stake knows this. They can feel so alone. And so it's an opportunity for stake leaders, stake presidency members, or a stake president to really engage with this individual and be their mentor during that time. Too often I hear stake presidents give the assignment to the individual who's maybe lost their membership to be in touch to set the next appointment.

Speaker 1 00:17:11 It should be an proactive process of reaching out to that person, making sure they're not buried in chain, making sure they have the support they need, bringing in additional help, bringing in community, and helping shepherd that person down the path. Too often it can sort of feel like a probationary, legalistic process when it's not. Or I've heard

individuals just sort of in the dark with their repentance process. What happens next? Okay, he wants to meet with me every few weeks, but, uh, do I set that appointment? Do, then why doesn't he reach out to me? And, and they can feel like it's all on them in this process. But what a blessing it would be to have a proactive stake president and leader who's reaching out maybe weekly, every other week through a text, through a phone call, and is very intentional about how they are shepherding that person who they desperately want to return to the fold.

Speaker 1 00:17:59 So I would love to change that stigma that so many leaders have of sort of forgetting the person or seeing it as one more thing in their, that on their, to-do list that Yeah, down the road we'll do that. Or they get to their year closer to their, you know, that six month mark or the year mark, and they think, okay, something's gonna happen soon. Right? Right. And they don't hear from their leader and it takes them to do that. Now I realize you have so much to do in these callings that uh, it can be looked over, but this should be a paramount shepherding opportunity for individuals to hear regularly from their leader who's gone through this membership council with them to encourage them and touch base with them. Don't just make it a six week, you know, dentist appointment that just, yeah, it needs to happen.

Speaker 1 00:18:36 We'll touch base. How you doing? Sounds good. All right. Keep working. No, like become their friend. Be connected and encourage them. And if you don't have the bandwidth to do it, you need to bring in community to assist you in that and make sure they feel that support. Chase them, pursue them. Leave the 90 and nine and go after that lost sheep because it is well worth your time. Alright, the sixth principle to possibly help a brand new stake president is empowering the Stake Relief Society president. Now I've heard mixed results from this. Some people say, oh man, my, our stake Relief Society president already really busy. Others say, well, I don't know. A lot of times she's not sure what to do or how to connect with the award Relief Society president or what her or her role even is. And I would say the more you can empower that stake Relief Society president, the more it's going to help you, uh, have a positive experience in your role as a leader.

Speaker 1 00:19:25 And so bring her in to those stake presidency meetings, right? There's often a clerk there and there's often a, a executive secretary. There's no reason you couldn't bring in a stake relief society president more regularly, if not weekly, to those stake presidency meetings and discuss things, get her perspective on things, right? Engage her in the experience and make sure that she has plenty to do. 'cause I have had heard from many Stake Relief Society presidents that they're kinda lost, they're not sure what to do and uh, they kind of meander around, show up to this ward and that ward and their stake and yeah, sure, they're connecting with the, the, the Ward Relief Society presidents, but they're sometimes lost. So inviting him into the core of, of what's going on in the stake can really be a blessing and give you additional perspective. It's gonna help you, uh, succeed in your calling.

Speaker 1 00:20:10 And this really doesn't need to be proactive effort because the handbook really only gives two general directions as far as the stake Relief Society president, which is meet with a stake presidency once a month, instruct award Relief society presidencies on their responsibility, and that's it. So there's a lot of, of, of wiggle room in there to really have a dynamic experience and encourage that Relief society president to really jump in and have

influence. Alright, the seventh point being a stake president has to deal with the stake president's wife. No doubt. When an individual is called to the stake president, it is the family that is called to the stake president, especially the wife of the stake president. This can be a tricky time over nine years, where the wife of the stake president can somewhat feel lost, right? Their husband is off running something in the stake on Sunday, she's sitting alone.

Speaker 1 00:20:54 It's even different than being the bishop's wife, where at least you see your, your husband at church or there he is on the stand. And that's not the always the case with stake presidency's wife. So invite her into the experience. And I saw this in many ways during my time in the stake presidency where I saw the wives of the stake presidency members come together and even sort of have this, have their own type of presidency that wasn't an official type of presidency. And they would reach out to the wives of the bishops or the wives of the members of the bishoprick, and they'd have dinners or just get togethers, socials. They would often take individual wives out to lunch and just really connect with them on a friendly basis so that they would be encouraged in that unofficial role. Being in church leadership is remarkable.

Speaker 1 00:21:33 You've witnessed miracles almost on a weekly basis. Or you go after the church and you experience healing as you watch the savior step into the lives of individuals who are struggling so much while at the same time your wife may be home with the young kids or with the teenagers and just dealing with that real life and that context and missing out on these miracles. And so you may come home refreshed, energized by the spiritual experience you had, and your wife isn't there. And so by inviting her into that experience as much as possible, inviting her to shepherd the wives of others, inviting her to engage with you with visits or at some level, will do a remarkable job of not only feeding your marriage, but helping you be a better leader. And I'll point you to an interview actually did with my wife, where we talked about her time as the bishop's wife and the dynamics were there, the tension at times, the the struggle and the blessings that came from that.

Speaker 1 00:22:22 And so I'll link to that in the show notes so that you can listen to that as you wish. And the eighth and final principle or suggestion I have for new stake presidents is this concept of a three year reset. Because nine years is a long, long time, right? Almost a decade of your life dedicated this role as stake president. And so it can go really stale after a few years. You sort of get into the, the rhythm of things. You, you know, you've done this thing six times and now you'll just do it a seventh time. And here we go. We, you know, what's the, what was the agenda for last year? Let's just do that again, but a little different. And so you can really miss out on that refreshing energy that comes with a new stake president because when a new stake president is called that year is actually everybody's in the presidency's on fire.

Speaker 1 00:23:05 They feel the energy, they're in this role, they wanna make a difference, and here they go. And so being intentional about having some form of reset after maybe three years so that you feel like that new stake president, even if you aren't technically that new stake president, that may look like shifting some callings up, right? Maybe getting a new counselor, moving one of your counselors to another role that would help there. Or just the intention of having a retreat between you and your counselors or your, your stake council of going somewhere and refreshing recharging and saying, we're starting over anything we've done in

the past, we're gonna look at it differently now. What can we do to have a refreshing reset? And that'll keep the energy going and help you sustain yourself through those long nine years. And, uh, it will bring new vision to the stake that maybe things that worked in year one don't really work in year five.

Speaker 1 00:23:56 And so yeah, you need to reapproach, reassess and restart. All right, those are just my ideas from my experience. You may agree with some, you may disagree with others, but I would love to hear, uh, what your experience is when maybe you've served in a stake presidency. But I would love to hear your ideas of what worked for you. If you've been in a stake presidency or any other type of leadership calling, you can actually go to the Leading Saints community where we have a, a conversation that's already going on about these tips and experience that I've shared. Many people disagreeing with me, but I love it. I'd love to hear opposing views and new ideas. So go to that Leading Saints community, I'll link to it and love to hear your opinion as well. And don't forget to subscribe to the Leading Saints newsletter where you get the, the freshest thought or perspective that's on my mind as in regards to church leadership. And we get a great conversation going. Alright. Be sure to subscribe to our YouTube channel as we are having more and more content only come out exclusively the on the YouTube channel of leading saying. So hit the subscribe button, the notification button, and, uh, make sure that you don't miss any of this content.

Speaker 1 00:25:04 That concludes this episode of the Leading Saints podcast. We'd love to hear from you about your questions or thoughts or comments. You can either leave a comment on the, uh, post related to this episode@leadingsaints.org or go to leadingsaints.org/contact and send us your perspective or questions. If there's other episodes or topics you'd like to hear on the Leading Saints podcast, go to leadingsaints.org/contact and share with us the information there. And we would love for you to share this with any individual you think this would apply to, especially maybe individuals in your ward council or other leaders that you may know who would really appreciate the perspectives that we discussed. And remember, grab your copy of my new book, is God Disappointed In Me on Amazon or in select Costco stores?

Speaker 2 00:25:56 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 in 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.