



Stake President of Inner-city Houston | A How I Lead Interview with Dean Andersen

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Speaker 1 00:00:04 It seems like struggles with pornography get most of the airtime these days since it is so available in modern times. However, drug abuse and substance addiction is growing at shocking rates. As a church leader, you need to be prepared. We have a library full of resources focused on this topic. The presentation I would recommend you start with is Joseph Grenny's presentation about what we can learn from Captain Moroni to help our loved ones overcome struggles with drugs and alcohol. His story of how he loved his son through his addiction is powerful and redemptive. You can listen to this presentation in the Recovering Saints Library by going to leading-saints.org/fourteen. Put your information in there, and that will give you 14 days at no cost. I made it easier for you. And put the link in the show notes, or you can go to leading-saints.org/one-four.

Speaker 1 00:01:25 So my name is Kurt Francom, and I am the founder and executive director of Leading Saints, and obviously the host of the Leading Saints podcast. Now, I started Leading Saints back in 2010. It was just a hobby blog, and it grew from there. By the time, uh, 2014 came around, we started the podcast, and that's really when it got some, uh, traction and took off. Uh, 2016, we became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and we've been growing ever since. And now I get the opportunity of interviewing and talking with remarkable people all over the world. Now, this is a segment we do on the Leading Saints podcast called How I Lead, and we reach out to everyday leaders. They're not experts, gurus, authors, PhDs. They're just everyday leaders who've been asked to serve in a specific leadership calling. And we simply ask them, how is it that you lead? And they go through some remarkable principles that should be in a book that should be behind a PhD. They're usually that good. And, uh, we just talk about, uh, sharing what the other guy's doing. And I remember being a leader just simply

wanting to know, okay, I know what I'm trying to do, but what's the other guy doing? What's working for him? And so that's why every Wednesday or so we publish these How I lead Segments to share.

Speaker 1 00:03:07 Today we're headed to Houston, Texas to talk with Dean Andersen. How are you, Dean?

Speaker 2 00:03:11 I'm doing great. How are you, Kurt?

Speaker 1 00:03:13 Good. Now, we were just discussing before hitting record, you are, uh, I mean, Houston is huge, right? I mean, tons of people, especially with the church, but you are the OG stake of Houston, Houston, Texas Stake. Is that right?

Speaker 2 00:03:26 That that's correct. <laugh>. That's awesome. Center Stake of Zion. We like to say <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:03:31 Nice. Well, we'll see about that, but no, uh, that's awesome. And, um, and you were just like weeks ago, you were just released as the stake President after, was it a good nine years?

Speaker 2 00:03:40 It was the full nine years was released three weeks ago, so, yeah. Nice. Still, still reeling in the, wow. This is, this is interesting <laugh>

Speaker 1 00:03:49 And, uh, you're, you're also going through a, a job change as well. And so your schedule just blew wide open, huh?

Speaker 2 00:03:55 It did. Which is kind of fun. Wow.

Speaker 1 00:03:58 Nice, nice. And um, now your last name is spelled the same way as Elder Andersen. Is there any relation to him, or

Speaker 2 00:04:06 No, not the Apostle Uhhuh. Uh, Wilford Andersen. That was a 70, I guess he's emeritus now. He's my cousin, but, but no, no, no relation to, to Elder Andersen.

Speaker 1 00:04:16 All right. Well, we're all, you know, brothers and sisters, right? So, <laugh> That's

Speaker 2 00:04:20 Right.

Speaker 1 00:04:21 So I wanna give a shout out to Brock Griffith, who, uh, first put your name forward it as saying, Hey, you know, you gotta interview, you know, president Andersen. I'd be a great fit for the how I lead segment, because I guess this, when this calling came, and I'd love to have you tell this story. You, uh, I mean, you weren't looking to be long-term where you're at, is that right?

Speaker 2 00:04:39 That's correct. We, we had moved to, to Houston, kind of downtown area. Uh, we thought just for one year our, we had a daughter who had tried out and got into the

high school for the performing of visual arts in Houston, Uhhuh <affirmative>. And so we, we had to be in the school district, so we lived there. It was close to where I worked. So we rented a, rented a town home. We were gonna be there for just a year. And, uh, six months in, uh, got this calling. And so we bought a townhouse, <laugh> and, uh, and, and love it here now. So,

Speaker 1 00:05:12 Yeah. Now, uh, this is an inner city. I mean, you've frame it as an inner city stake, is that right?

Speaker 2 00:05:18 It is. It, it includes all the downtown area, um, mm-Hmm. <affirmative> Houston has a couple of loops. You know, there's an inner city loop and then a, a bigger loop and, and it's all inside the second loop. Um, and much of it inside the, the inner city loop. So we have some of the very wealthiest areas and some of the very poorest areas in Houston, uh, in our stake. So Wow. It runs the gamut. <laugh>,

Speaker 1 00:05:43 Is it pretty transient then, throughout the stake?

Speaker 2 00:05:47 Uh, a lot of it is because we have, uh, three universities and the medical center that's at it has, I think four medical schools. And there's, you know, optometry and all sorts of, you know, uh, dental schools. We have a ton of students. They're, uh, they're actually kind of the backbone of our stake, frankly, really, because even though they're only there for, you know, usually four to six or eight years, uh, we, there's always, uh, an influx and they're fantastic. So it is, it is probably more transient than most. We have A-A-Y-S-A ward, um, and it's, it's great. We have three Spanish wards, um, oh, wow. Yeah, so, and, and, uh, a French branch that is just, uh, about to kick off that we just talked through. So that's deal with lot of, a lot of immigrants from lots of places, including Africa.

Speaker 1 00:06:41 So how many, how many units total then?

Speaker 2 00:06:43 10. 10 units? 10, yep. Six regular English wards, three Spanish wards, and a YSA ward. Wow.

Speaker 1 00:06:50 And then that, that French branch, I guess is, is that self-sustaining for the most part?

Speaker 2 00:06:55 Yeah, it'll, well, again, it hasn't actually, maybe I shouldn't say <laugh>. It hasn't actually been formally announced until, uh Oh, okay. Ne next week. But, uh, it's, it's, it's gonna be awesome. Okay.

Speaker 1 00:07:05 Well, we'll, we'll make sure we, we, uh, don't, uh, release anything too soon, but, uh, okay. That's great. Um, now I, I'm intrigued by this student dynamic. Just the transient nature of student wards or, i, i, not wards, but student areas, right? With universities. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you have students coming, coming and going. And, um, you know, sometimes there's that feeling of, Hey, they're just here for a temporary time. You know, maybe we'll have them contribute a little bit, but they're busy, you know, let's just do their, their their thing. And then there's the other side of, now let's get 'em involved and maybe put some in the

bishoprick and, you know, these types of things. So, I mean, how would you explain just how that dynamic works in, in your area?

Speaker 2 00:07:43 You know, it, it is an, an interesting dynamic and an interesting, I guess, dilemma. Um, I know when I was first called, there was a, a bishop that was serving who was in his residency <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:07:57 Oh, really?

Speaker 2 00:07:58 Um, in medical school, yes. Yeah. And so, bless his heart, he, that, that was one busy bishop. Um, but, you know, I know the previous stake president just felt like, sorry, but <laugh>, this is what the Lord wants. And so we called him and he was fantastic. So we do have a lot serving in many positions. Um, and, you know, we find that they, that they're always, that they're outstanding. And these are tough medical schools, some of the top medical schools in the country. So they're all just really smart, articulate, um, really hardworking. And those are the kind of people that, yeah, they, they may not be able to, uh, you know, put in as much time as some people, but they're extremely effective. And so we've kind of said, look, we, we think you're gonna be happy if you serve. We, we understand your limitations.

Speaker 2 00:08:46 And I know there's one counselor in the Bishop Rick that, you know, one Sunday a month, he's not there, but everybody understands it. And that that's okay. You know, he is, he is in residency too. So, um, but, but we found when we give people things to do, uh, they respond and they become happy. And sacrifice is, is a privilege. Um, so, you know, we don't apologize so much for the sacrifices required. We try to be sensitive and not, you know, not overdo it. Um, but, uh, I, I, I find our stake to be incredibly, I guess, accepting really nonjudgmental. We're incredibly diverse. Houston is known as the most diverse city in the country. Wow. Um, country. And, and our stake absolutely fits that. So you walk in any of our stakes and you would feel very comfortable no matter what ethnicity or <laugh> Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:09:41 Or socioeconomic background you came from. 'cause we've got people like that. And so people are very open and accepting of, of what people can do, what people can give, and, and it, and it works really well. And by the way, same with our, with our YSA ward, uh, they're fantastic. You know, the change where the YSA members are, the counselors and the Bishop, Rick and high council members and everything, that was a fantastic change. And we, we rely on our YSA heavily for lots of, lots of callings. They're, they're awesome <laugh>. Yeah. So you give people things to do and they respond and they do it well.

Speaker 1 00:10:14 That's great. I'm curious, just, you know, you, you were called after being in the stake for, for six months. Uh, what was the process of choosing counselors? Like? Was it just raw revelation or, uh, I mean, what do you remember from that process?

Speaker 2 00:10:27 You know? Yeah, it was a raw revelation there. Um, and yeah, I didn't know very many people at all. I was serving as the ward young men's president when I was called <laugh>. And so I Oh, really? Went away from any other stake. And, uh, but the counselors I chose, you know, there were people that had been interviewed and were, you

know, in the list of 30 or 35 people that had been interviewed by the General Authority and, and, uh, that they said, yeah, you can pick anybody from here. So yeah, my wife and I said, you got, you got 40 minutes to do it, <laugh>. So, yeah. So, uh, we took that time and, and it worked out great. And both of 'em served all nine years. Oh, cool. Fantastic man.

Speaker 1 00:11:04 Yeah. Yeah. What do you remember just from those early years just getting started in the calling? Um, did you, did you bring much experience as far as, had you been a bishop or anything that, that a similar dynamic?

Speaker 2 00:11:14 You know, I, I had not been a bishop. I had been a counselor in a stake presidency for, uh, I guess four and a half years. And then I had moved out of that, um, uh, of that stake. So word to the wise, don't, don't move out to, to get out of a calling. You might get something worse, you know, <laugh>, they'll

Speaker 1 00:11:32 Find you. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:11:33 They'll find you. So, um, yeah, so it, it was interesting, um, the, those early years. But, you know, I, I just found that, uh, when we tried, uh, the Lord would figure things out and good people, good humble people that would, would, uh, step in and, and help out. And, and, and it was also an interesting dynamic because the Houston stake had been a Spanish stake up until that point for Oh, really? Over 20 years. Yeah. So it was, so we were not only, you know, it was, it was like a brand, it was like a brand new stake. So there was nobody, we had no high council, we had no presidencies of any organization whatsoever. We had to start from scratch. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So that was, that was interesting as well. And then we were, we were actually integrating Spanish and English wards, which had not been the case, you know, previously the Spanish, they had their, their stake.

Speaker 2 00:12:32 They were very proud of that stake. That was an interesting dynamic to, you know, help them to feel welcome and loved and, and, you know, and, and deal with this kind of shock of having their stake dissolved, if you will. Um, so, you know, we switched things up and there, you know, there was a building that had only Spanish words, and another building had only English words, and we kind of mixed them up a little bit to try and integrate things better. So we had a lot of interesting, uh, challenges that I think helped us grow and brought us together as a stake. And it, and it worked out great, by the way. I didn't speak Spanish at all when I was called <laugh> and not a word. So, yeah. So that was interesting to, to, uh, learn Spanish, which I eventually did, so.

Speaker 1 00:13:17 Oh, cool. Right. So it was a Spanish stake. And so I imagine they, they kind of split that stake up some words, went to a different stake, you kept some words, and then other wards may be dissolved into English speaking words, is

Speaker 2 00:13:28 That That's correct. So they, wow. So the, there were I think seven or eight, uh, wards that were put into four or five different stakes, and we kept three of three of them in our stakes. So. Wow.

Speaker 1 00:13:40 So just that integration, that sounds like almost an impossible problem, <laugh>. So I mean, was there anything that you felt like as, as you were getting into, to stimulating that integration? I mean, what, anything that worked or what'd you learn from that?

Speaker 2 00:13:55 So I learned that love is, is how people, um, get behind challenging things. And, and when you really, genuinely love somebody, they sense it. And so our, our Spanish members, sorry, I get emotional <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:14:12 That's

Speaker 2 00:14:13 Alright. I love, I love our Spanish members so much. And, and they responded to a difficult, you know, for them that was, that was a real challenge. And you could see that was like a gut wrenching thing that wow, our stake was just dissolved. And yet they just humbly and completely accepted this gringo who did not speak Spanish. Um, and, uh, and they just go, okay, we'll, we'll, we'll do it. Both my counselors are bilingual. And so that was helpful. One is Mexican. Um, but, uh, so it, it, you know, it just worked. And, and what we found is, you know, I guess one of the principles is that the only way you can really lead is with kindness, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, and, and people sense that love. And so I think while at first that was challenging, I think, I think the people knew that, yeah, we may have been incompetent, but we loved them <laugh>. Yeah. And, and they knew that. And so, and, and that's kind of how things, uh, I think eventually got to where, you know, it was, I, I think it was really, really going well. Eventually, it, it, we had some rough things at first, but it was, it was great.

Speaker 1 00:15:34 Yeah. Awesome. Um, anything else about just the demographics, uh, unique characteristics of your stake that we'd be worth mentioning or,

Speaker 2 00:15:42 Uh, sure. We have, we have a lot of, uh, African-American areas, you know, some pretty solidly African-American areas in our, in our stake. Um, and one of our wards, uh, was kind of, uh, was kind of based on a branch that had been there called the Sunnyside branch, which is a, an area that's, uh, almost exclusively American. And that ward has continued to, to really prosper and a lot of, a lot of baptisms. I think that ward had over 30 baptisms in the last year, and probably 29 of 'em were African American. So that was exciting to see that. We also, uh, I think I mentioned tons of immigrants from all sorts of countries and, uh, a lot of, a lot from, from Africa. So that's why we have this French speaking branch. They're virtually all, uh, Africans that are on that, in that French speaking branch.

Speaker 2 00:16:37 Uh, we've been doing, you know, French translation and SAAC meeting and French Sunday school classes, you know, leading up to the formal branch. But, uh, so yeah, so we're, we're bringing in people from all over the world, um, and, uh, and, and integrating them together. So it's a, it's kind of a, it it's a unique, uh, setting where people see that the, you know, the culture of, of the gospel kind of overwhelms, uh, you know, the kind of the silly, uh, <laugh> differences that we may have as humans, you know, from our language or our ethnicity or whatever, that doesn't matter. Uh, the gospel kind of overcomes that. And, and I think our stake is a, is a living witness that that is very possible.

Speaker 1 00:17:29 Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. Well, that's, that's great to to hear. And sounds like there's just some good things happening in, in your area. Um, was there, uh, I remember, you know, I was serving in a stake presidency in a inner city stake as well, here in, in Salt Lake. Uh, and we were lucky to get a bishop that stayed the full, you know, five or six years in this term. Did you find that you just really didn't know how long, maybe a bishop or some of those, uh, heavier responsibility callings would, would be around?

Speaker 2 00:17:57 Um, you know, that that is sometimes a challenge, although actually we really didn't have that. We had a couple of bishops that moved out before their time, but for the most part, no, most of our bishops served. Now, one of the real challenges we have is that most of our, uh, most of our members in the three Spanish wards are not documented. Um, the, the large majority are, are not documented. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so to be a bishop, you have to be documented. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so that was a challenge. I mean, for all three of our Spanish war, when we would go to replace the bishops, um, the pool of candidates was really small. And we had, uh, honestly, three situations where, uh, the Lord miraculously sent the Bishop <laugh>, they moved in, they moved in at the, at the time we needed them. Um, and, uh, in fact, uh, they're all three serving right now, and they're fantastic bishops, all three of them.

Speaker 1 00:18:59 Wow. That's awesome. Well, as we do on the, how I lead segment, as I have you send me a handful of principles that you, uh, uh, you know, led by or, or learned on, on this path, uh, during your time as stake president. And so let's go through some of those. The first one is focused on, uh, or is about focusing on your inadequacies is actually selfish. Maybe unpack that for us.

Speaker 2 00:19:21 Sure. So, you know, I, I know probably most people feel this. I remember, uh, when I was called and I went into the first coordinating council meeting with all the 22 stake presidents. I mean, we, it's, it was a, oh wow. Three, three councils. We have three coordinating councils, Uhhuh. But that first meeting, we were all together. Once a year, everybody meets together. So I'm there in this room with 21 other stake presidents. And I thought it was, you know, I, I felt like the old, uh, Sesame Street, which one of these is not like the other <laugh> <laugh>, which one of these just doesn't belong. You know, I just thought, wow, I, I don't feel like I, I belong here. Um, and, you know, and then you just realize, okay, you just, you, you gotta get over that and not, not let it, uh, bother you because you don't really have time for it.

Speaker 2 00:20:10 And there was a, a talk, um, by Elder Edward Dubay in the April, 2021, uh, general conference. And he said something that really, it just, it it struck me, um, because if he, he articulated something that I think, you know, maybe the spirit had been trying to teach me, but he explained, you know, he, he told that story, that famous story where Elder Holland came up, and because he said he felt so inadequate and he didn't belong. And, and Elder Holland came up and grabbed him by the cheeks, you know, and <laugh> <laugh> and, and, and told him, you know, it's good to see you here. And he patted his face and he says, I felt like a baby. But, but then he said, he said, um, he said, I felt the Lord's love through these men. And

then he said, elder Holland, through his kind natural actions, helped me to overcome my self-centeredness and my feelings of inadequacy.

Speaker 2 00:21:07 And that was the first time that I had associated feeling inadequate with being self-centered. You know, that's so true. If, if you're focusing on, well, I'm not good enough to do this. Well, it's not about you, you know, <laugh> Yeah. And that's, that, that's what, you know, one thing I, I think I learned is yeah, it's really not about you as a, as a leader. You are simply the vehicle that the Lord is using at that time. And it's a relatively short time, and it goes by incredibly fast in retrospect. Um, and, you know, and then somebody else does it. So it's not you, you're just the instrument doing it. So if you're focused on your inadequacy, you're, you're not focused on what the Lord is trying to do for these people. Um, and that, that's not effective or efficient. So

Speaker 1 00:21:55 Yeah, that's so helpful because there's sort of this, uh, uh, you should call it like fake human, fake humility, right? Where Yeah. You, you feel like, well, I wanna be humble person, so I'm gonna sort of deflect compliments or say, ah, gee, I'm not that great, or I can't do that. Yeah. And I'm, I'm just a goof over here, you know? But Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, that is a form of pride, right?

Speaker 2 00:22:14 It is. It really is. And that, and so that, anyway, I thought I, elder Dube was very, is very inspired, uh, uh, way of putting it and, and helped me to, to understand that principle. So,

Speaker 1 00:22:26 Yeah. And if, if people are familiar with Elder Dubay, I mean, I believe he was called really young as a 70. I mean, he still looks very young. Yes. <laugh>. So I can imagine there's those strong moments of inadequacy. So, um, awesome. Uh, all right, next one is God can do amazing things through weak and simple and flawed servants that, that keep, uh, humbly trying sort of, uh, uh, similar to the last point as well.

Speaker 2 00:22:50 Yeah. It, it is, um, I guess what one thing I found, uh, is that, um, you know, God will do miracles through us, not because of us, but because of our willingness to, to let him, him do it. Um, I know the area 70 that, uh, did our training when we were first called, I'll never forget, he said, he said, president Andersen, the Lord does not call people because they're the best qualified, or the smartest, or the most righteous necessarily said that, that's not why you're here. Um, if you think that's why you're here, sorry to distribute you <laugh> that notion, but that's not it. He said, the Lord calls people that will, that will just allow him to, you know, work through them to do his, his will. And, and then he also said kindly, he said, and by the way, the, the church is pretty resilient. You can't break it so <laugh>,

Speaker 1 00:23:45 So,

Speaker 2 00:23:46 So don't worry. You'll be fine. You know? Yes. Um, and

Speaker 1 00:23:49 Many have tried, but failed. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:23:51 <laugh>. Exactly. So, and, and we really found that to be true. Um, I, I think that, uh, you know, we saw some amazing miracles, um, with people that, you know, that really didn't feel like maybe they were, you know, that they, they had much to add, but, um, God did things through them. And so it's just, if you try and, and it really isn't even so much what you do, um, it's just being humble enough to let God do things. And then he makes even our feeble efforts, he, he makes them become valid, and he makes the counsel that we give to people, become the counsel that they need if, if we're sincerely and humbly trying to to do that. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:24:37 So is there any story or anecdote that comes to mind that you think back in those, those years of service that sort of, uh, that shows that that principle,

Speaker 2 00:24:47 Um, wow, there, there are a lot, but, uh, I, I, I do know, uh, a case of a, a bishop that, that we called and he really was just shocked. He could not believe we were calling him to be the bishop. Hmm. Um, but he, you know, he humbly did it. And, uh, and now by the way, he's a counselor in the brand new stake presidency that was just called <laugh>. Oh, cool.

Speaker 1 00:25:14 So,

Speaker 2 00:25:14 You know, so he, he went through his full almost six years, um, uh, Hispanic brother, um, uh, and, uh, real short, but just faithful as the day is long. And, and, and that that was a case where I, you know, he really, really felt like, wow, how can I do this? Yeah. Um, but he was just fantastic. Just, he is so humble and his members sensed it, and boy, they loved him dearly, um, throughout his service. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:25:45 Yeah. It's fun to see, you know, uh, some of those individuals grow and flourish in, in those callings, right? Yes. And now they're ready for the next, the next calling, the new, that's the new challenge, right? Yeah. Awesome. Alright. Next principle is, as priesthood leaders, we can only be effective according to principles set forth in Section 1 21. Of course, kindness, gentleness, meekness, love, unfeigned, et cetera.

Speaker 2 00:26:09 You know, every, every general authority or every authority that, that came and visited us for our stake pre or for our stake conference every year, um, I noticed a pattern, um, that they were invariably very kind and never critical. Um, and Elder Ringwood, elder Michael Ringwood was, was one that came, and he told us a story. He said, he said, uh, there's an apostle, and he actually later shared it was actually President Nelson <laugh>, who had, who had, who he heard this from. But he said, brethren, nobody likes constructive criticism, <laugh>. And we, he says, you don't, you don't need to criticize, even if you're constructively doing so <laugh>, um, you can love people and compliment them. Um, and that's much more effective in getting them to, to actually change. He said, people know, you know, the Ringwood said, you know, I could go through your reports, but you know these reports better than I do, you know, the areas where perhaps, uh, things could be better, and you'd probably like them to be better.

Speaker 2 00:27:17 He said, I don't need to point those out to you, but he just went through and he had us, instead of saying, what are the challenges, he's, he asked each of us, all of us, you know, including executive secretary, clerk, go through and say, what are you most proud of in your stake? And, you know, tell us, tell us two or three things that you're, you're really proud of in your stake. And by the end of that, and yeah, we had all sorts of problems, you know, <laugh>, we didn't have the best statistics in the, in the church, I'm sure. But by the end of that, we're going, yeah, dang right. We have a good stake. You know, <laugh>, we were, we were all feeling really good about, you know, things. But, but at the same time, it, it didn't make us like complacent. It made us, it made us grateful, and it made us kind of recognize good things that were happening.

Speaker 2 00:28:03 And so we really tried to do that of, of, uh, instead of saying, you know, you're really messing up here. Uh, rather we'd say, you know, these things are going well, how, you know, how, how is it that you got that to go so well? And, and then how can that be applied in other areas, you know? And, and, and it really just was a much more effective, and, and by the way, the tendency, it's a hard tendency to overcome, you know, I work in the business world like everybody else, and, and the, the, the management principles just do not apply. And, and when we try to move those worldly management principles into the church, that's it, it doesn't work very well. That's not, that's not way the, the way the Lord's Church operates. It's, and, and, you know, and the scripture is really true, that the only way you can maintain influence is by those, you know, kind of channels. It's, it's the only way it works.

Speaker 1 00:28:57 Yeah. Yeah. That, I'm glad you emphasize that maintain word, because it, in the short term, it feels like nothing. You know, a tyrant actually gets a lot of things done, <laugh> Yep. For a minute, but for a minute. Follow

Speaker 2 00:29:09 We

Speaker 1 00:29:10 That's right. That's right. Uh, the next principle is God doesn't punish people. Oh, man. I'm excited for this one. Explain this

Speaker 2 00:29:18 <laugh>. Well, I, I guess throughout my service, maybe throughout my life, certainly through my service over these, these last nine years, I, I have come to believe that we have a lot of kind of cultural baggage, um, in, in, in, in ourselves, uh, as, as church members are, you know, it's kind of the puritanical Protestant background from which the church came. And, and, and our scriptures, frankly, you know, don't help us with that sometimes because the scriptures do portray God with kind of these human emotions of being angry or jealous or punishing or whatever. But I think other scriptures more correctly, and certainly modern prophets really correctly, um, or, or I guess more accurately and in a way that we can understand today, uh, you know, portray God as how he is completely loving, a hundred percent loving, a hundred percent kind, a hundred percent merciful.

Speaker 2 00:30:22 Those are God's characteristics. God doesn't get mad, he doesn't get angry. He doesn't punish, he blesses. And then if we, if we do what he says, we reap lots of blessings. If we don't, we forfeit blessings and he can't give us blessings, which we don't qualify.

But, so that, that, that's, I think one thing that I've really learned is just the, I guess just the relentless love that God has for us. And, and so it's important that we, that we remember that in our, in our interactions with people, that we never give them the idea or, or the, uh, uh, we never let them feel like God is, is angry with them or, or wants to punish them. I mean, repentance is a positive, beautiful thing. And President Nelson sure talks about that a lot and helps us understand that, you know, no, it's, it's, sin is painful.

Speaker 2 00:31:20 Repentance isn't painful. We associate it with pain because we're recognizing the, you know, our, our wrong headedness or whatever. And that, you know, it's kind of painful, but No, it's, it's the sin, it's painful. The repentance is beautiful. Yes. And, and, and, and helps us grow and be happy. So, and I just wish we could do a better job at, at conveying that all the time so that especially our youth don't, don't feel like that, you know, repentance is this dreary thing that God wants to get 'em on a foot fault or something. No, he wants to bless you. He delights to bless you. Like the doctrine Covenant says, wow,

Speaker 1 00:31:57 Dean, people are gonna think I set you up because I literally wrote a book on this topic, <laugh>. Oh, <laugh> called, is God disappointed in Me Removing Shame from the Gospel of Grace? And it like literally just came out. And so I promise you, we did not set this up. Uh, but I did not know that to say the least, Dean, we are on the same page, brother. So preach. I so appreciate you touching on that. And 'cause it is, it's a, it's a crippling, uh, misunderstanding of God when we think it is. He is just, just perpetually disappointed in us. And it's like, you, you know, there's not, there's nothing to work with there. You can't repent you. Yeah. 'cause you're just stuck, you know? So. Yeah. Amen. Love that. Was there anything like specific, like I, and you know, sometimes I like to get the nuts and bolts here as far as like, that individual walks into your office and they're like just buried in the shame of what they've done. They're sort of in the, the middle of that repentance process or trying to figure their way through it. Like how would you coach a bishop on like, just approaching that? Does anything come to mind?

Speaker 2 00:32:56 You know, we, we did see a lot of cases. Um, uh, I'm, I'm happy to say I think we had more, uh, reinstatement, uh, membership councils than we did <laugh> membership, you know, than, than than the first ones, which was awesome. Um, I, I think that anybody that goes through that process comes to see pretty quickly that love in action. You know, I used say, boy, I wish every member could, could experience a membership council and feel that love that is there. And, and I think that's where, you know, that's where you see it when somebody comes into your office and they're, you know, they're unburdening themselves of something that, you know, they feel really bad about. And, and then they, they sense, and you, and it is always amazing. 'cause I, I think, I suppose I thought before I ever participated in that myself, that yeah, you would be like, man, how you did what, why did you <laugh>?

Speaker 2 00:33:53 And you don't, you just, you don't feel that you really do just feel like you wanna help 'em, you wanna love 'em, you want 'em to get, get over this. And, and it's, it's a real blessing. I is to say, as a stake president, virtually every interaction you have with people is when they are exhibiting faith, whether it's an interview, you know, whether it's to get the priesthood or go on a mission or get married or, or, or repent everything. And so it really is, it's,

it's pretty remarkable that all your interactions are with people that are exhibiting faith. And that's pretty cool. And repentance is no exception. I mean, you're not dealing with somebody who wants to repent. I mean, if, if, if, if they don't wanna repent, they're not gonna be in your office, you know, <laugh>, you're not gonna have that interaction. And so, uh, I, I just think we, you, you see that over time. And, and I think it just comes naturally as you, as you feel that love, which is so, so powerful.

Speaker 1 00:34:49 Yeah. Really appreciate that. Um, I, I'm curious, you know, especially after, you know, nine years of, of serving as a stake president and, you know, you've done several stake conferences, um, run several meetings. I'm just curious if you had a unique approach in some of these things as far as like even just starting with a stake conference. Like was there anything different? You did things you tried, um, you know, how do you get people to show up to the Saturday evening session, <laugh> or <laugh>, anything come to mind that, uh, you learned about running an effective stake conference?

Speaker 2 00:35:20 Wow, that's a good one. I, I, I can't say that I would ever hold our stake up as here's the way you do it, <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:35:27 Right, right,

Speaker 2 00:35:28 Right. Um, we, we, uh, struggled sometimes to get people, um, to get people there. Uh, interestingly, our last one was probably the best one we ever had attendance wise. Um, but, uh, um, no, I, I, I do think personal invitations is one thing we found to be effective. You know, we would divide it up and, and I would invite the presidents of every organization, you know, the bishops and the Elko presidents and, you know, really a CIP and, and Sunday school. I, and then my counselors would take their corresponding people and we would issue, uh, try to issue individual invitations to, to attend stake conference. And that that usually would, uh, you know, including the leadership session. Yeah. We didn't always do that, but we, we try to do that. And that was, that was helpful. I think people, I love it sense because some days forget, you know, yeah. It's a strange meeting on Saturday afternoon. And so, you know, just an individual invitation I think was helpful.

Speaker 1 00:36:26 Yeah, yeah. No, that's really, or we'd think, you know, just standing up in a general meeting and announcing, Hey, here's the, the conference and the dates and the meetings and the times, and yeah. Uh, no, we're done. Good enough. We're the, the email blast. Right. So, so would these be like in person invitations if possible? Maybe

Speaker 2 00:36:44 Yep. By the phone? Yeah, by by phone typically. Um, and, you know, that's, that's how we do it. Say, Hey, just wanna let you know. And, and then, yeah. And then we would actually ask, um, for kind of a, a, a follow up, say, is, is your bishop gonna be there? Is your presidency gonna be there? And kind of ask them to, to, uh, just let us know so we kind of get an idea of how many people we gonna be there, you know, if we were do breakouts or group activities or whatever. So we would have an idea. And that, and these are helpful. That was the leadership session. Yeah. Yeah,

Speaker 1 00:37:17 The leadership session. Obviously hope they come to the general session as well, but Yeah. Um, but yeah. Interesting. Uh, anything about like, just, uh, working with your high council that comes to mind as far either running the meetings or how you split up the, the responsibilities among your counselors, or what comes to mind?

Speaker 2 00:37:34 I don't know that we had anything unique there. You know, we would try to make sure that people understood their assignments. Uh, for a while we tried asking people to give kind of, uh, stewardship reports. Um, and yeah, some were, you know, not real happy to, to do that. So it was like, fine, we never, we, we would just say, you know, we would invite them to do it as a way for them to kind, um, you know, help, help themselves to see how it was going. We had some that kept going all the way to the end, but, uh, you know, we, we stopped pushing again. One of those things. We asked if they would do it and they didn't do it. We didn't feel like we should harangue them, um, and didn't point out that they weren't doing it. Uh, just, you know, would thank those that were, and so give them opportunities to, to, uh, to return and report. That was a, an important concept to, you know, give them opportunities to do that. So, yeah.

Speaker 1 00:38:34 No, that's, that's really helpful. Well, Dean, we, we covered a lot here. This is, uh, really helpful, and I hope it was maybe a, a really reflective time for you now that you're released and you think back in those nine years. And so I appreciate you just sharing your experience and sharing what worked, what didn't work, what you learned, and, uh, really is helpful for, uh, leaders out there. So the last question I have for you is, as you think back on those nine years of being a leader, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Speaker 2 00:39:02 Wow. It, it really has been, uh, an amazing experience. It really has. Um, and, and I guess I have come to know through, I guess through just the miracles that I've seen. I mean, I, I know absolutely that God directs things in the church, and, you know, we're not, the church is a, a tiny fraction of all the people in the world. We don't have a corner on truth that, you know, nothing like that. I think we need to remain humble. Um, but I absolutely know, um, that, that there are a lot of miracles that take place on a day-to-day basis throughout, uh, throughout the, the world and every ward, every stake. And, and God does care about what we do as leaders. And that's, that, that has, that has helped me. I mean, it is just very, uh, reassuring to me to know that God really does care about, you know, our every Sunday school class and every priesthood quorum, you know, and, and he'll help people and he'll, and he'll cause miracles to, to take place. And I've, I've seen them, I've seen hundreds of them, and it's, it, it's really, it is a privilege to, to participate in that and just kind of witness, uh, you know, witness the, the, the, the miracles that, that God will work in people's lives. And it's, it's real.

Speaker 1 00:40:37 And that concludes this how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it. And, uh, I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email, on social media, in a text, wherever it makes the most sense, and share it with somebody who could relate to this, this experience. And this is how we, how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guy's doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting for your area. And, uh, that's, that's where great leadership's discovered, right? So we would love to have you, uh, share this with, uh, somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great. And also, if you know

somebody, uh, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on the How I Lead segment, uh, reach out to us. Go to leadingscenes.org/contact. Maybe send this in individual an email, letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We will reach out to them and, uh, see if we can line 'em up. So again, go to leading saints.org/contact. And there you can submit all the information and let us know, and maybe they will be on a feature How I lead Segment on the Leading Saints podcast. Quick reminder, go watch Joseph Granny's presentation on helping loved ones overcome addiction by going to leading saints.org/fourteen.

Speaker 3 00:41:55 It came as a result of the position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by the God of Heaven, who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the Declaration was made concerning, the only 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.