



## **Bearded Bishops, Rated-R Movies, & the Honor Code | An Interview with John Hilton III**

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Speaker 1 00:00:04 It is time for another episode of the Leading Saints Podcast. My name is Kurt Francom, and I'll be your host. As always, please don't fire me because I really, really like this job. So, leading Saints is a nonprofit organization dedicated, helping latter day saints be better prepared to lead. And one way we do that a, a large way we do that is through this podcast we cover all sorts of topics as it relates to leading as a latter day saint. And this episode that you're about to hear, you are going to love this episode because we, we talk with John Hilton III, who's A BYU religion professor, and recently came out with a new book called The Founder of Our Peace, Christ-Centered Patterns for Easing, worry, stress, and Fear. I mean, phenomenal book that was inspired to come out at a time like this. And we talk specifically about a chapter in this book about fence laws.

Speaker 1 00:00:57 Now, what is a fence law? You may ask, well, we get into the details of that, but fence laws usually end up with people asking questions like this. Is it appropriate for a youth to go on a school dance four days before their 16th birthday are rated? Our movies really against our religion? Should we restrict people from the chapel? Once the sacrament has begun, can a bishop have a beard? What about, is green tea against the word of wisdom? Now, I'm sure many of you have various answers to these questions, but they all go back to a concept of fence laws. And in leadership, especially in church leadership, this is huge concept to, to understand. Because when you're a leader, you're putting up fences, you're putting up fence laws, you're putting up fence policies, and to really think through why you're doing that. 'cause sometimes it's really appropriate to put up fence laws.

Speaker 1 00:01:46 Other times it may be more discouraging to those you're leading than not. Or you may be an individual in award where you feel like, oh, my bishop is obsessed with fence laws. Every turn he's putting up another fence, another policy, another restriction, another rule. Right? So John Hilton does a phenomenal job articulating this in his research around fence laws is is awesome. So here's my interview with John Hilton III. The following episode is a throwback episode one that was published previously and was extremely popular to see the details of when this was originally published. See the show notes. Enjoy this throwback episode. Today I find myself in a kitchen in Orum, Utah with John Hilton. How are you? Great. Good to be with you, Kurt. Yeah. You've uh, we've done some interviews in the past. I've been here before. Yeah. And, uh, I always, I always enjoy sitting down, especially with someone like you, A BYU professor, and, uh, 'cause you've thought about things a lot more than I have, so, <laugh>. Anyways, here we are. Thanks

Speaker 2 00:03:05 For coming to my home. It's great to be with you.

Speaker 1 00:03:07 Yeah. Now, uh, if people aren't familiar with you, maybe just put yourself in the context. Uh, who are you, what do you do and, and why are we sitting here in your, in your house?

Speaker 2 00:03:14 So, my name's John Hilton. I'm a religion professor at Brigham Young University. I've been there for about 10 years. And before that I taught seminary and institute with the Seminary Institute program of the church. And I love teaching the gospel. And I also enjoy reading and writing and researching about different gospel topics. And lately one area that I've been really focused on is fence laws. And that's what I'm excited to talk about with you today. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:03:37 And you reached out to me as you're in the midst of this book project and the book comes out. Does it have a title yet?

Speaker 2 00:03:42 So the book is called The Founder of Our Peace, and it's released in April of 2020.

Speaker 1 00:03:47 So it sounds like a book focused on Christ. Is that

Speaker 2 00:03:49 <laugh>? Yeah, exactly. In fact, that just on the side, that's one of the unique titles of Jesus Christ. Uh, Bedi calls him the founder Oh wow. Of peace. And so I do love that. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:03:58 I've read it, which I'm sure

Speaker 2 00:03:59 Before, but yeah, you've read it is, it just popped out. Jesus is the founder of our peace. He's the one who establishes it. And I think, you know, maybe I can, I can frame our conversation with the quote from Elder Udo. Let's do it here. He says, for some there are so many shoulds and should nots, that merely keeping track of them can become a challenge. Sometimes. Well-meaning amplifications of divine principles, many coming from uninspired sources complicate matters further diluting the purity of divine truth with manmade

addenda. I think here's the key. One person's good idea, something that may work for him or her takes root and becomes an expectation. And gradually eternal principles can get lost with an labyrinth of good ideas. Oh, wow.

Speaker 1 00:04:46 <laugh>. I have to like sit and just, you might have to just

Speaker 2 00:04:50 In your soul. But it, I mean, what a powerful insight from elder udo that, that we lose peace in our lives when we try to do all of these good ideas that aren't actually part of the core gospel of Jesus Christ. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And I think that's one of the things that's really impacted me as I've done some research in this area, is to see how sometimes myself as a leader, I've actually caused harm to people by asking them to do things that were maybe good ideas, things that had worked for me, but not necessarily for them. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:05:19 So is, is this the general premise of the whole book? I mean, we're gonna focus on maybe one chapter, but what's the Yeah. How would you describe the, the premise,

Speaker 2 00:05:25 The overall premise of the book are looking at different ways, patterns of peace, ways that we can come to Jesus Christ and find greater peace through him. So this topic that we're speaking about today, offense laws, is one chapter in

Speaker 1 00:05:36 The book. Awesome. That's great. And I, and I love these, uh, I see maybe more of a focus on that. I just interviewed like Ty Mansfield and, and, and his co-authors about the, the power of sealed this like, just 'cause it's so easy to get in this, uh, this checkbox gospel where we're just sort of, what do I do next? You know, go, go, go. When reality, a lot of it's, let's just step back and, and find the peace. Right.

Speaker 2 00:05:54 Right. Exactly. That's

Speaker 1 00:05:55 Cool. Alright. Fence laws. So how would you introduce this concept of fence laws?

Speaker 2 00:05:59 So think about, here's a parable. Imagine in your backyard you have this big hole. And no matter how hard you try to fill the hole, you can't fill it. It's the parable. It's just a permanent hole <laugh>. So it's dangerous 'cause kids are playing in the backyard. So you decide to build a fence around that hole. Yeah. Now everyone's safe and protected

Speaker 1 00:06:16 Seems like a logical step.

Speaker 2 00:06:18 Perfect. So the hole represents sin and the fence around it is some type of protection that I put in place to keep myself or others from falling into the hole of sin. Right. So that's the fence and fence loss. And this is actually a very ancient topic in, in the, in the missionary, a book of Jewish commentary that dates to almost 2000 years ago, one of the instructions given to the early Jewish leaders was to make a fence around the law. The law is so serious and sin is real. We do not wanna fall into that whole of sin. And so I would maybe make a distinction between fence laws, which are these extra rules that I put in place versus a core

law. So a core law would be maybe the 10 commandments or laws that affect our temple recommend. So maybe the law of chastity not having sexual relations outside of marriage, that's a core law. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But there's a variety of fence laws that you could put in place. Say maybe a, a college student says, all right, I'm not going to kiss anyone until I, until we're like on our fourth date. And even then, it's only gonna be for five seconds. Now you can kiss someone for more than five seconds and still have a temple, recommend <laugh>. That's not the core law law, but it's a fence that this person is putting in place because

Speaker 1 00:07:32 Of the slippery slope.

Speaker 2 00:07:34 Right, right. Exactly. Or maybe, I remember my mom gave me a fence law when I was a teenager. She said, John, do not go into the bedroom of a member of the opposite sex. Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>. Okay, great. Right.

Speaker 1 00:07:44 You're not gonna find that in the scriptures. Right. Maybe even in a handbook, maybe in the, the strength of youth, but Right. But it's not, that's a fence law. That it's a fence

Speaker 2 00:07:52 Law. Right. And this is not to say that fence laws are bad. In fact, you mentioned for the strength of youth, lots of things in the, for strength of youth are fence laws. But I wanna be really clear that just because something is a fence law doesn't mean we should disregard it. Right. There's different sources for fence laws. So prophetic sources of fence laws, like for the strength of youth, of course, we want to pay very close attention to like, we believe in following the prophet. That's a different issue than, oh, is it a fence law or not? The challenge comes when myself as a leader, give other people fence laws that may or may not be directly from the Lord. Right. Right. First prophet. So it's the spirit and the prophets, those fence laws we're for sure gonna follow. It's the other category of fence laws that we have to be careful about.

Speaker 1 00:08:33 Yeah. So, uh, this is sort of reminding me about the interview I did with our mutual friend, Anthony Sweat. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. He, and maybe you helped him with this paper as far as the, he talked about the core doctrines and did you help him with that or?

Speaker 2 00:08:44 I I mean, I was blessed to be able to read it before it was published. Oh, okay. Nice. But yeah, doctrines, core doctrines kind of this expanding

Speaker 1 00:08:49 And then policy doctrines. Right. Yeah. So, and, and that's maybe a different way to look at that because a lot of times, uh, one leader may say, all right, or someone may say, well, that's just a fence law that leader created. And he may say, no, that's doctrine. Right. Right. And so we, we be, there's this passive aggressive struggle of like, I'm telling you to do this 'cause this is doctrine, even though we're not even sure what doctrine that's connected to. Right. And kind of gets us into trouble at times. And

Speaker 2 00:09:10 That's where I think it's really important for us to remember what President Udo said sometimes. Well-meaning amplifications of divine principles complicate matter. Mm-Hmm. So it might be actually a really good thing. And I mean, just to get some

practical applications on the table. So what kind of movies is it okay to watch? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, do young children have to obey modesty rules? Is it okay to, I don't know, wear certain types of attire? What type of swimwear is okay to wear? Is it okay to go on a hike on the Sabbath day? How about a drive? How about a boat ride? How about water skiing? Like, at what point? And I can see in your eyes, like, you know, d different things. You're like, no, that's not, oh, come on. Yeah. Like, you know, so all of a, some people are like, oh, that's ridiculous. Why would you even talk about that? And other people are like, are you serious? Like, that's a core doctrine. Right. So depending on your views on fence laws, you'll have very different reactions to these types of questions. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:09:59 So, I mean, I think you've defined it as well. And, uh, is, have we touched in as far as the, that fence laws can be good, right? Is that where we're heading next? Or is there more of far as this definition we need to

Speaker 2 00:10:09 Consider? A lot? I, yeah. I think it is really important. We can't overemphasize the goodness of fence laws. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And, and maybe you have some personal stories from your life. I remember as a missionary elder, Richard G. Scott came and spoke to my mission and he said something to the effect of, while you're on your mission, find a time of spiritual reflection when you can set a standard for yourself of what you will do and will not do to express feelings. Hmm. Said, the spirit will guide you. So I thought that was a great idea. I prayed and I set, it was offense law. I set for myself a standard that I was gonna follow after my mission for living the law of chastity. And I really feel like that kept me safe and in a spiritual sense. 'cause that whole of sin is real. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, I love that Elder Scott invited me to set my own fence law. Right. He, he didn't tell me, you know, here's what you should do Through the spirit, I was able to identify that for myself, and that made it for me really meaningful. Yeah. How, how about for you, how, how, like, how have you, what would you say are the benefits of fence laws? How have you seen these?

Speaker 1 00:11:07 Well, I just think it's, it's one of those things, like I always talk about, uh, you know, systems over goals, right? And so it's easy for me to have a goal of like, I'm not gonna do this sin that sin or I'm gonna be this type of person. But to me, I, I go back to, well, what's my system of doing that? And that's where the fence rules come in, right? So this isn't necessarily sin, but it can maybe lead there as far as like eating, like, especially I'm 37 years old. If I eat after seven o'clock, it goes to my hips, John, I'll tell you that. Right? So I have this defense law that I just don't eat after dinner, and I remind myself when I'm drawn to the pantry, I'm thinking, well, it's eight 30. I don't do this right now. Right? Mm.

Speaker 1 00:11:43 And so again, is, there's nothing wrong or immoral about eating after that time, but it's a, it's a fence law that I know that there's consequences if I cross that it may not, maybe it won't happen. Maybe I'll just eat, you know, a rice, uh, patty and it'll be fine. Right. <laugh>. But, but even spiritually, you know, and, and you know, the, just with these fence laws, I think a lot of people, they, they just come to mind, especially from our teenage years, right? The one as we were growing up that, uh, you, we don't watch rated at our movies, right? Well, is that in the handbook? Like, oh, well I can point to a President Benson talk where he says that, well, he's setting a, a fence law there that we've sort of absorbed that. Many people will say,

well, that's doctrine. We, we just don't see that even. But this filthy PG 13, I think we're okay. Right? <laugh>,

Speaker 2 00:12:23 So, yeah. Well, and that's, that's one of the, I guess in a minute maybe we lay some of the dangers, but one of the dangers is that we focus on the fence instead of the law. So my mom tells me, don't go into the bedroom of someone of the opposite sex. Okay, great. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And I strictly adhere to that, but I break the law of chastity. Right. <laugh>. 'cause I, I didn't, I,

Speaker 1 00:12:41 We are in the family room,

Speaker 2 00:12:42 Right? <laugh>, I didn't, I didn't know that was wrong, <laugh>. And so it's really important that we stay focused on the mark.

Speaker 1 00:12:48 So, so I think the main, uh, point here is just like recognizing that fences are there. And many times leaders will set up fences, uh, for, for good reason. But leaders do set, set up fences or, or individuals

Speaker 2 00:13:00 Setting. And especially for, especially for young people like children. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> need fences. Right? Right. In, in repairable you're setting the backyard or the fence in the backyard so kids don't fall in the hole. And, and so at some point in time, those choices need to shift away from a child or, or the parent imposing on the child to people making their own decisions. That, but, but even still, I remember talking to a mission president and he said, look, John, I've gotta set fence laws for my missionaries. Like, some of them don't understand that playing video games for 12 hours with an investigator is not fellowshiping. Right. <laugh>. So, so I'm not suggesting that, uh, that there's never a place for fence laws. Certainly they're beneficial for us individually as they're guided by the spirit, and we should always follow the prophet. So whatever those prophetically given fence laws are, we want to follow. And then there's this interplay between, in between am I giving a fence law that's helpful, or am I actually imposing what's helpful for me that may be harmful on someone else?

Speaker 1 00:13:55 Right. And, and I think that's the, the word that maybe, and I dunno if this now is a good time to talk about the danger, but that's where the danger comes in, is when we start, uh, making these fence laws universal, that, uh, no, this is, this is the, this is the law. And uh, maybe it's not a fence that I put up, but it's there and we need to follow it. 'cause the fence is there. Right?

Speaker 2 00:14:13 Yeah. For sure. And I think that's, that's kind of the key. And there are, there are several different dangers that can come. One of them I think is just the kind of feeling overwhelmed with a heavy burden, just feeling like you have too much to do. Um, and maybe one kind of like stereotypical example, let's say that there's a, a woman and she feels inspired by the Holy Ghost to read her scriptures for 30 minutes a day. So she's doing that and feeling good about it. And then her ministering sisters come and teach her about the importance of writing a tender mercy down every day. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And then her Relief Society president challenges all the sisters to read Daughters of my Kingdom in the next three months.

And then the high counselor tells everyone to read all the general conference talks, and then the, you know, and then all of a sudden this frenzy to complete, it goes back to what you said of this checklist, right. And what could have been this powerful spiritual experience then becomes a mad dash to complete this never ending list of things to do. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:15:07 And, and again, these aren't necessarily like fences in the sense of that they're stopping you from doing something, but they're more of, like, you, you're creating a boundary of like, let's all go to this corner of the backyard, even though the, the hole's over there, but let's come over here. 'cause this is where we're supposed to be. And I see this, you know, we're, we'll probably publish this after general conference and who knows what'll happen or the results of that. But, you know, in October, president Nelson asked everybody to study and focus on the restoration. But this created this frenzy of like, wards sort of doing all sorts of spiritual gymnastics to show how well they can focus on the restoration. And then it become, then we miss the point. It's like, well, I, I, I'm doing this thing, I'm focusing on the restoration, but maybe we're missing because all we know is we're just supposed to study it. Right. And, and we miss it all Right. Even though we're juggling, come follow me over here. And Right.

Speaker 2 00:15:53 Well, one of the, I think most commonly misquoted scriptures is in the gospel of John chapter five, verse 39, it says, search the scriptures for them. You think he have eternal life. And a lot of times we'll use that to say like, oh, search the scriptures. It says right here, search the scriptures. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But in context, Jesus is saying, you search the scriptures because you think, you think, and then you have eternal life, but eternal life really comes from me. It's the same sort of thing. Yeah. They're focused on the scriptures, but they're missing the, they're, the scriptures are pointed to Jesus and he's right there in front of them and he's missing it. Yeah. And that, and sometimes I think to go back to that parable, it's like, in some cases we build a fence and then we're like, well, someone could hop that fence. So we build a second fence and a third fence. And so someone's looking out saying like, wow, I thought it was a beautiful backyard, but all I can see is the, the fence. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:16:37 There's just a bunch of wood back here.

Speaker 2 00:16:39 There's just a bunch of wood back here. Yeah. And I, people have different personality types. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And I remember a, a situation where the bishop set some really aggressive goals, and I'm the type of personality that like, kinda like you said, spiritual gymnastics, but if the bishop says to do it, we are gonna do it. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So I'm killing myself trying to achieve all these goals. And one time we're in ward council and we're discussing the goals, and the certain goal comes up and the bishop's like, oh yeah, that one's really hard. I'm not even working on that one. And I'm like,

Speaker 1 00:17:11 What?

Speaker 2 00:17:12 <laugh>, like I'm killing myself. Uhhuh, and I, and it's just a different perspective. Like for the bishop, his, his idea of leadership is you set a high bar and you know, everyone jumps for and as high as you get Hooray. For you. Yeah. Whereas my view is like, if you don't make it to the bar, you might as well die <laugh>. And, and so I think that's one thing

to be sensitive and aware of, is just people are gonna view whatever goals are set differently. Right?

Speaker 1 00:17:35 Yeah. And that's so helpful to, to ponder about, because, and, and I wanna maybe stay here a little bit and, and because this is a common pattern I see with a lot of leaders, you know, maybe someone's called as as a bishop and they think, ah, you know, this is my time. I've been asked to do this, I'm gonna do a really good job. And they, they sort of look out over the ward and they think, ah, there's one thing that, that needs to change. Oh, there's five more. Then they have this list and they think, okay, this, these people, they seem so apathetic. Like we gotta get them going. You know, they're, they're, they're not getting it. And so what they do is they get their bishoprick in a room and they, they then come out of that meeting after several hours with this program or this initiative, here's the bishop's challenge for the year, and it's full of these check boxes, right? Like, we're gonna be, we're gonna do family prayers award, you know, everybody's gonna do family prayer. And again, these are rooted in such precious, um, behaviors that really can change a heart. But then it becomes this, uh, this circus of just these fences of, all right, we've created this initiative. 'cause this is our fence. We're gonna keep everybody in this, in this, uh, part of the, the vineyard and nobody can leave. And if you leave, you're sort of, you're not doing what the bishop says. Right. And then it's, we're, um, have

Speaker 2 00:18:40 To feel guilty. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:18:41 'cause we're, we're formalizing the, the gospel people. And, and we sort of, I think this is a natural human tendency that we want to turn everything into an equation. Well, if you just do the vi the Bishop's five point plan, if you just study the restoration, then this will all be great. You'll, you'll be happy and the gospel will be fulfilling to you. But then it turns into, well, I'm just so overwhelmed as an individual and I don't wanna look at the bishop because in fact I don't wanna even go on Sunday. Right. And that's again, the opposite of what the, the leader hoped to, to have happen.

Speaker 2 00:19:09 Right. And it can be really subtle. I mean, think about a award goal, like, okay, this year everyone go to the temple one more time than you went last year. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> seems super innocuous, but there's probably someone in the ward who is counting, and they're like, well, boy, I go to the temple every week and let's see, last year I went twice one week. So I, I guess I better go 53 times this year. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And that's not the, that, that, that was not the intent of the goal. Right. They were trying to get maybe the person who goes once a year to go twice a year, something like that. But, but there's gonna be some conscientious soul. Like my cousin who said to me, John, if I try to do everything I'm asked to do, I'm gonna break Uhhuh <affirmative>. You know? And that's, that is, uh, that's not healthy.

Speaker 1 00:19:45 Right. And, and I think, again, I wanna be very clear in this that I'm not necessarily, a bishop should never put initiative together, or a program or leadership should never do these things. But just be aware of the dynamic, right. Of you could state and you can



think, this is great idea. Like this has really helped me in my life, but that doesn't mean it's not necessarily gonna help every individual, help them in their life, this formula that you've created.

Speaker 2 00:20:04 Right. So let's look at, if you don't mind, let's look at a scripture that we quote a lot and maybe take a different twist on it. So the savior says, come unto me, I'll eat that labor and are heavy laid and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. Now, anciently, all of these fence laws that we've been talking about, they were known as the yoke of the law. That's what they were called. And right after this statement, there's no chapter breaks in the original right after the statement are two exchanges that Jesus has with people over issues of sabbath day observance. Is this okay to do on the Sabbath? Mm-Hmm. Is this not okay to do on the Sabbath? And so I think that maybe at least one way that we can look at this verse is coming to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, you're heavy laden with all these fence laws. Because what we're talking about, we've kind of jumped into today here and now. But this was a huge issue. Yeah. In the time of, in fact, once you start looking at the life of Jesus with the fence laws lens, you see so many examples where the savior is either getting into trouble or maybe even intentionally violating some type of fence law. He doesn't break a commandment, but some type of cultural rule offense that had been put in place, he'll tweak.

Speaker 1 00:21:16 Yeah. Or he'll kick it down a lot. <laugh>,

Speaker 2 00:21:17 He'll kick it down. And so maybe when he says, come to all you the error, have you laden, he says, Hey, you're burden down with the laws. Take my yoke upon you. My yoke is love God, love your neighbor. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. That's what we're gonna work on. Yeah. All the other details like, can you light a fire on the Sabbath? How many steps can you walk in the Sabbath? Well, we're gonna set that on the side. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:21:36 And oftentimes, uh, with that scripture, you know, it's easy to look at it in the context of just life's burdens. Right? Like, uh, I've, you know, I'm working two jobs and I'm having a hard time paying the mortgage. I need to go to Christ. Right. But oftentimes, like maybe how the savior was in the context of the scripture explaining that you're heavy laden by all of these rules from your quote unquote religion that somehow have gotten put up over the years. Like, put those aside and come to me and, and take my yoke upon you. Which is a simplified approach to the gospel. Right.

Speaker 2 00:22:05 Right. And I'm glad that you kinda made that caveat earlier about, you know, you're not saying that people shouldn't never set goals. And I think we do need to be really careful. 'cause if we, I mean you and I are having this conversation, hope that everyone who's listening can sense that there's faithfulness and obedience here. No one's suggesting like, yeah, like throw away all those rules of your religion.

Speaker 1 00:22:23 Like, or maybe just go to church once a month. Try that for a while. Shackles

Speaker 2 00:22:26 That are binding you down. But in the, in the context of what Jesus is saying, there really were a series of things that were extra layers of rules that had been put

down. And I think that right now, as a church institutionally, we're in the process of maybe separating out what's really our core doctrine from some cultural practices that have cropped up over time.

Speaker 1 00:22:47 Yeah. Yeah. And this is why I always go back to the question of like, what, what are you doing to as far as identify some of these fences in, in your, in the church or in your local ward? I mean, there should, maybe there's these traditions where it becomes, and I've heard of, of these where there's this annual program, this dinner or something that has been happening for years, right. This is tradition, but it's so, it so overburdens the ward that they can't even do, you know, come follow me out of the question now. 'cause I've gotta focus on, you know, cutting out these doilies for this dinner coming up or whatever. Right? So we overburden ourselves down with some of these traditions. And so I think it's good for a leader to just consider what are we doing to really pointing at stuff and saying, okay, why is that fence there? Why do we do that? And is it connected? Like, is it in the handbook? Okay, it's not in the handbook. So why do we do it? And what if we just got rid of it? Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:23:33 And I, I, I think that's a lens. So Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> it is just kinda like anytime we're sitting inward council and we're talking about either an, an old tradition or some new program we wanna implement, just put on your fence law lens. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> put on those glasses and look at it to say, how does this, like, is this an added burden that we could take away? Are we layering on something new that doesn't need to be there? Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:23:53 Awesome. Where can we go from here? And I'm sort of making these sort of categories as I'm learning here. So sometimes these fences are in the form of like, maybe programs. Yeah. Sometimes they're in the form of, of, I don't wanna necessarily say commandments, but maybe policies or things that, uh, defense law is like your your mom's fence law, right? Like, yeah, we don't go, we are not alone with someone of the opposite sex in, in a bedroom. Like that's the, and

Speaker 2 00:24:14 Sometimes they're really simple. Also, I use the word rules, like in a congregation, the presiding authority says, guys, don't chew gum in church. And like, this has actually been said in <crosstalk>, like, but that's not in the handbook. It's clearly some type of extra rule that we were adding. And, you know, the savior really, really, as we talked about railed against this, here's, uh, from Mark chapter seven. So the Pharisees come and they criticize Jesus, and they say, why are your disciples not walking according to the tradition of the elders, but they eat bread with unwashed hands. And so you can see even in their question, they're not saying this is against the command. They're saying, this is the tradition. This is what we do. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> your disciples are even with unwashed hands. And this is not about, you know, some type of virus and bacteria.

Speaker 2 00:24:58 It's a question of ritual purity that they've added to their law. And then Jesus talks about how they make the word of God void because of their traditions. So I would say, like, this is another area we haven't really talked about, is that sometimes fence laws can cause us to look beyond the mark. I guess we touched on it a little bit earlier where, you know, if

you're setting this goal, these goals around, okay, let's prepare for the restoration, we just have to remember that the mark is preparing us spiritually for general conference anymore with the restoration, not all these different check

Speaker 1 00:25:30 Boxes. Yeah. Because sometimes it can suddenly turn into like, no, what President Nelson wants is when he wants, every individual that comes to conference is educated as the BYU PhD scholars that, that, you know, did their, you know, PhD around the restoration. Right? Right. So we come, so, you know, hyper-focused on, oh yeah, well, I'm just gonna bathe in the restoration when in reality, like, why don't you just take that doctrine or that concept and put it on the table and, and engage with it and any way that you want, engage with it for the next six months in order to be ready for conference.

Speaker 2 00:25:58 I think, and that's a great example if President Nelson is giving the invitation and then letting the spirit drive the application, not filling in all the details. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:26:07 And right there, I, I wanna highlight that because in our, in our own leadership, it's so easy as the local elders quorum president to fill in all the details for him. No. This is how the program's gonna go. And you should feel bad if you don't come. 'cause I'm the elders quorum president and this is the inspiration I've received. Right. But instead say, how can I formulate this invitation in a way that will engage their soul and that they'll find their own path in the, the same direction that we're all going.

Speaker 2 00:26:32 Absolutely. And sometimes this happens, uh, maybe on a personal level or a family level. So we're, we're having family scripture study, and I wanna have it be reverent during family scripture study. And kids are talking and no one's focused, and they're bouncing around and I'm like, shut up everyone. <laugh>, feel the spirit.

Speaker 1 00:26:46 This has never happened, John.

Speaker 2 00:26:47 You know, and so like, the whole goal of scripture study is to feel the Holy Ghost, because I've become so focused on like, well, we gotta read our four columns before Yeah. The 10 minutes of scripture study time is over. I now I have to yell at everyone to get 'em on track. Totally missed. Right. The mark.

Speaker 1 00:27:02 Gotcha. Or so, so we look beyond the, we, we, we set the mark, but then we somehow we get, we we miss it completely. Yeah. We overshoot

Speaker 2 00:27:09 It. And some, at least for me in my life, sometimes fence laws are a catalyst for doing that. Here's a personal example. This is so embarrassed, you might have to edit this out of the, the podcast. So I was a BYU student full of zeal as a recently returned missionary to obey every commandment with exactness. And there was a, as you know, BYU has an honor code around the length of shorts you can wear. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. There was a woman in our ward who would always come over, if you can believe it, wearing short shorts. And she had the audacity to complain about the honor code in my presence. Oh boy. I was so angry. And I just chewed her out and said, Katie, if this is your attitude, why don't you just leave BYU? And she started crying and ran out of the door.

Speaker 2 00:27:50 And I thought, good riddance, <laugh>. And then I, I was done a lot of repenting over the years. <laugh>. So then my roommate Joseph looks at me, he's like, John, wow. That was, that was a little harsh. Katie's only been a member of the church for two months. And now you should actually be nice to everyone. Sure. Doesn't matter. Right. Wasn't member of the church for two months or 20 years. Right. But I had actually had some experiences on my mission where new converts had been treated poorly by members. And I realized I had just fallen into the same thing. Like, and, and in some, in some respects, you could have like different arguments, like, well, the honor code is just defense law. Yeah. But when you sign the honor code, you agreed to abide by it. But at the end of the day, I gotta love my neighbor. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Right. And that doesn't involve judging them and harshly criticizing them. So I lost track of the second commandment because I was so focused on this little detail, hundred

Speaker 1 00:28:38 20th commandment that you created yourself. Right. <laugh>.

Speaker 2 00:28:41 So, I mean, we gave some examples earlier about the savior doing this. Think about in John chapter five, there's the man, the paralyzed man who's by the pool, and he doesn't have anyone to carry him down. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> when the water stirred up, I can't remember the exact, he's, it's like he's been sick for I think 38 or 39 years, a long time. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And the savior happens to meet him on the Sabbath day. I'm pretty sure the savior could have waited one more day Right. To heal the man. But he doesn't, he chooses this day. And it's actually not the healing that gets everyone in trouble. That Jesus tells the man, take up your mat and walk carrying around your mat on the Sabbath is the violation. Hmm. Well, why does Jesus do that? I he's totally focused on the mark. He's not worried about these little extra rules about carrying around a mat or not carrying around the mat. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:29:24 I I love that. 'cause there's, there's two parts to that, a miracle that obviously he wanted to heal the man and he loved the, that individual and he wanted the, you know, manifest the glory of God. And, and by healing him, but also he took these opportunities to kick down a fence. Right. And so in our personal leadership, sort of looking for these chances of, I'm gonna take this opportunity to, to kick down a fence here, and as an example to those that I lead, that let's consider the fences that are our life. And maybe some of 'em have to be, have to be removed.

Speaker 2 00:29:52 Let me share, I'll just share a quick example on that one. A friend of mine just told me he was serving in a bishop brick, and there was a family that was baptized into the ward. And the Sunday following the baptism, the daughter who was primary age came to church and she was wearing a cross necklace. And her grandmother, who had not been baptized also was with her wearing a cross necklace. So he observed this and later in the week went to visit the family in the home and just said, how's your experience at church? And the parents brought up the fact that the, a primary child had criticized their daughter and said, you shouldn't be wearing that. Hmm. And someone, an adult had gone up to the grandmother and said, we don't wear crosses in this church. Now, the whole issue around crosses and necklaces is a separate issue.

Speaker 2 00:30:33 But on the side I'll say that it's never been forbidden. You can't find a statement in general conference saying, don't wear cross necklaces in church. Like, definitely we focus on the living Christ. And there's been reasons and statements explaining why as a church institutionally, we don't wear to spay the cross. But there's no commandment against it. And so I was so impressed with my friend who said to the, said to the grandmother and the daughter, tell me why you wear a cross necklace? And they said, well, it's 'cause we believe in Jesus and it reminds us of him. And he said, you keep wearing that and I'm gonna go buy some cross cuff links and I'll wear 'em to church this Sunday. Nice. And some members come up to him and start criticizing him. And they're like, well, why are you doing that? That's a symbol of the death of Christ.

Speaker 2 00:31:12 And my friend says, well, look, there's, it's an empty cross. Christ isn't on the cross. This is a symbol of his triumph over death. <laugh>. And, and I'm not like advocat that we all go out and buy couplings. But to your point of, as leaders, I think we can advocate for those who are being unfairly criticized over offense law issue. And this has already come out. I think this is a huge point around new converts, people learning about the church and those on who are maybe not currently active in the church and trying to get back in. Oftentimes it is not our true doctrine. That's the obstacle. It's the cultural fences that have been set up.

Speaker 1 00:31:48 And there's the million dollar phrase right there. And that, that's what I appreciate that many times in the, with our good intentions of putting up a, a fence law of whether, regardless of what our intent is with that, we accidentally maybe tip over another fence like the cork command that's of, of love, thy thy neighbor. Right? Like, I'm putting this fence up and, uh, they see it as, well, you're keep keeping me out. And they, but you see it as, no, I'm keeping you away from, from sin or from whatever. Right. And so again, just understanding how fences are perceived by, by everybody involved and not run 'em off when <laugh> when they perceive a different way.

Speaker 2 00:32:20 Right. One more story, and this, to me, this shows the power of the fence. So I'm serving as a missionary in Colorado, and we got this, one of our investigators who was finally baptized, but his wife and children were not baptized and they never came to church. But we, my campaign, I were gonna give a talk in church on a Sunday. So we put a lot of pressure on like, please come here, speak in church. So I'm sitting on the stand, they're not there seeing the opening hymn opening prayer announcements, they're not there. Then we start singing the sacrament hymn. And I started to get nervous because they had a, I dunno, this isn't really a fence loob more of like an institutional practice. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> in this war building where they would close the chapel doors at the start of the sacrament to him, and they'd have some young men stand by the doors and not let anyone inter exit the chapel. So you can see where the story's going, and there's

Speaker 1 00:33:05 A literal fence, <laugh>, there's

Speaker 2 00:33:07 A good point. Right? Yeah. Like the point, we wanna protect the sanctity of the sacrament. So during the sacrament, while it's being administered, Brian strides into the chapel with his wife and three kids right behind him. And I can see Brian's face, it's this look of

pride. Like I did it. I brought my family to my new church. This is awesome. And then I watched this 15-year-old say, Hey, you can't be in here. And I know the 15-year-old meant to say like, oh, we've created this little fence law. Like, would you mind waiting outside for just saying? But like, Brian doesn't hear that. He just, in front of his wife and kids, he, he goes like, you can't be in here. And he's like, humiliated. So he and his family walk outta the room. Now what should I have done immediately, immediately jump outta my seat and run to him.

Speaker 2 00:33:45 But the power of the fence was so strong. So I'm like, well, I can't disrupt the sanctity of the sacrament. I better just sit here. And so I sat there and sacrament and Brian didn't come back in. And then I got up and left and went to his house. And by then it was too late. Yeah. He said, I will never go back to your church. And he never did. Wow. And I'm not, I'm not here to like be a criticizer or a judger of that policy, although I will never again live in a war that has that policy <laugh>. Um, but all the intentions were good, but we focused on the fence. Like, we're not gonna disrupt the reverence of the sacrament and we missed the mark. Right. Of loving people. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:34:21 Right. And again, another angle I want to reemphasize here. Again, we're not arguing, you should never put up a fence or have a fence law. But what is it about the fence law that's going to be obvious to those who are maybe not familiar with why that fence was put there? Right. Like, if you're going to create a policy, if you're gonna create this, this rule in your organization, how is the new person the next week gonna understand why that fence is there? Because if they don't understand why it's there, or if you don't have some system of under of explaining to them why it's there, they're just gonna see it as a fence that's excluding rather than, uh, helping everybody grow. Right. Right. Yeah. It's tough,

Speaker 2 00:34:55 Especially when those fences stack on top of each other. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> because it's, you know, it's, it's easy to build a fence, hard to take it down. Like you said, you start to have these traditions, oh, we always do this activity every year. It's a lot easier to start a new activity than to cancel the beloved tradition of the elaborate word Christmas party or whatever that might be. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:35:14 Yeah. This is, this is, uh, so helpful. And I'm just thinking like a, a great activity, like a bishoprick or word council would do, would just like take some time to say, all right, we're gonna spend the next hour. We're gonna write down every fence law that exists in this ward, good or bad, whether you like it or not. Let's just be aware of it. And, and then, and then ask yourself, well, is the ward aware of these fences? And are they more importantly aware of, of why we have these fences? And then what are some that we can get rid of right away? Right.

Speaker 2 00:35:41 Yeah. Yeah. I, I love that idea of just being conscious. Um, you know, a a related issue has to do with focusing on the fence when we're teaching. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So, I mean, you can imagine, uh, uh, teacher who just emphasizes the fence, but then the doctrine never really gets inside. And I'm totally guilty of this as a parent. When my son, oldest son turned 10 years old, he wanted to see the certain PG 13 movie. And I don't know what your opinions about movies are. I think there's some PG 13 movies that are great. Anyone

could see him. Sure. And there's others that are so naughty, no one should see him. Right. <laugh>. Yeah. So I did not want to have to have constant arguments about which movies we could see. So I, on the spot, I just made up a fence law and I said, oh, Levi, in our family, we don't watch PG 13 movies till we're 13. He's like, oh, okay. He's an obedient kid. So I just saved myself three years of discussion. But can you guess what he wanted to do for us? 13 three? Yeah. He,

Speaker 1 00:36:32 He started making a list for that 13th birthday,

Speaker 2 00:36:34 Watched three, three PG 13 movies on his birthday. So, so I started studying these things that we've been talking about a few years past. And one of my other children, uh, Maria, she was 11 years old at the time, and she wanted to see a PG 13 movie. So she asked me and I said, well honey, why don't you look it up, see what the content is and you make a decision? And she's like, what Dad? I thought in, in our family, we don't watch PG 13 movies till we're 13. I said, well, honey, why do you think we have that rule? Mm. And she looked at me and she said, I know. And so we don't watch bad stuff until we're older. I totally miss, like, I mean, I'd done such a great job of like the fence. She knew we didn't watch PG three 20, so at 13, but she just thought, oh, that's 'cause you shouldn't see bad stuff until you're older. No, actually we shouldn't see bad stuff because bad stuff causes the Holy Ghost to leave. I had not taught the principle that underlied the whole conversation. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:37:25 And, and just simply stepping back. 'cause it's so easy to sort of get in this mode of saying, we don't do fill in the blank in this family, in this ward, in, in this church. Right. But to step back and say, why do you think we don't do that? Right. And then allow them to engage with the spirit and, and, uh, find a deeper meaning. And then that gives you, uh, more to talk about or for their to reason to guide them. Because now you've given opportunity to consider why do you think that fence is there? Right.

Speaker 2 00:37:49 Yeah. So going back to what you referenced with Anthony Sweat, this idea of core doctrines where Elder Bednar uses the framework of doctrines, principles and applications. So often there's a temptation to go straight to the application. Whereas as a teacher, my, my best, I remember in 2015 in a general conference talk, president Nelson was focused on honoring the Sabbath day. And he did not say, here's the 10 things to do on the Sabbath. Here's the 10 things not to do on the Sabbath. He said, how you treat the Sabbath is a sign of your beliefs towards God. So that's the principle. Now you go fill in the application. I think that's the great model Yeah. For teachers especially because there's some people, and again, everyone has different personalities, but there's gonna be some people who will set a fence beyond your fence. So if I'm say like the,

Speaker 1 00:38:36 I've never seen this, John, I don't know what you're

Speaker 2 00:38:38 Talking about. <laugh>. So I'm the, the young women's teacher, and I tell my young women, you know, for me, I never kissed in high school. And so they say, okay, you know, I'm going to, I'm gonna never kiss till I'm married. You know, and then someone's like, well, I'm, then they teach that to their group, and then they're like, well, I'm not gonna hold

hands till I'm married. And then they never get married. Right. <laugh> <laugh>. So, so I mean, those are maybe some silly examples. But yeah. Another thing,

Speaker 1 00:39:00 Another example that comes to mind that I, I think he experienced in, um, a lot, maybe an individual. And, uh, when I interviewed Jason Hunt a few months ago, he's a professor up at BYU Idaho, and he talked about this dynamic where a student, uh, he's been a YSA bishop and a student may get up in a, in a testimony meeting and, and bear this deep heartfelt testimony about how, uh, reading the scriptures for a half hour before I do any of my homework or studying has completely made a change in, in my grades have gone up and all these things. And so then we take that, we think, well, I'll, I'll take that fence. I'll absorb that formula that they've, they've done it, it maybe doesn't work for them. Right. And, and so we get in this trap of saying, well, I see your fence, but I'm gonna study a, you know, an hour of descriptions before. Right. And then that may be even helping more when in reality we're just hearing one person who's describing how they've applied the gospel in their life, their, their application rather than the doctrine. Right.

Speaker 2 00:39:52 Yeah. And at the same time, sometimes hearing someone else's application, if it's not imposed on me, can be motivational and help the Holy Ghost. Right. Speak to heart. Like my parents as I grew up, they always stayed in their church clothes on Sunday. They probably told me too as well, I don't remember that. I always, you know, just wore shorts and a t-shirt as soon as church was over. So I'm on my mission and my mission president had a 15-year-old son, and I noticed that he always stayed in his church clothes all day Sunday. And one day I was like, Richard, why are you doing that? Why don't you change? And he said, well, and I just, in our family, we wear church clothes all day Sunday and it helps me feel the Holy Ghost. I was like, wow. Like, I, I'm sure I'd heard that before, but it had never dawned on me.

Speaker 2 00:40:31 And so I thought to myself after my mission, I'm gonna try that. And so that now is a fence that I've said in my life that's really helpful for me. Right. I feel the Holy Ghost more. And now clearly there's a danger if I like impose that fence on others or judge other people who have a different fence. But I do wanna just say, it's great. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> to see the fences of others. And as you're inspired by the Holy Ghost, take that into your life. Yeah. The cha So there's a tricky balance. Like we talked about at the beginning, there are some really positive things about fences. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. We just have to be careful with some of these other nuances. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:41:05 So we're talking, we we're taking this direction as far as teaching Right, right. With fences. And I love the, the Bednar, uh, model, and I reflect on it a lot when I'm giving a, a talk or, or teaching a, a Sunday school class where I think it's so easy to start with the applications. Right. Like, you know, this is, I think of a, a recent discussion about, about how the, the gospel's being applied and the importance of, of doing a certain thing. Right. And so we think this is the application, like let's focus on the application, what other applications are out there, there, and then we don't even touch on the, the doctrine. So I always push myself, how can I start with a doctrine in this discussion and then leave it up to everybody in the room to formulate their own application. Right.



Speaker 2 00:41:43 There was a great example of this a few years ago. So it was during, when they had a young women's session of general conference, they showed a, the young women's presidency showed a video and it was of a, a group of young women who were trying to figure out what type of swimsuit was allowed to wear, uh, they were allowed to wear. So in the video it talks about how they prayed, they read their scriptures, and at the end of the video you see several, uh, young women say something like, as I prayed, I wasn't sure at first, but then I got my answer. And over and over again I got my answer. I got my answer. But the video never says what the answer was. Yeah. <laugh>. So I, the whole purpose of the video is God can give you personal revelation. Yeah. So a couple weeks after this session of conference, sister Dalton was giving an address to youth leaders, and I was there, and she said, ever since we showed that video, we have been getting tons of calls to Salt Lake.

Speaker 2 00:42:28 Like, Hey, we loved your video, but what was the answer? <laugh>, you know, and they, and I think that's a, that's healthy for us to know as teachers. Uh, sometimes people are gonna really want us to give us offense for them. And maybe as a parent you might have that responsibility, but oftentimes it's doing exactly what you said. Let's go back to the doctrine. Let's go back to the principle, teach that clearly, and then say to the individual, why don't you pray and talk to the Lord about what this specifically means for you in your

Speaker 1 00:42:55 Life. Yeah. Yeah. And this is the danger I'm always trying to balance with, uh, leading saints is that, uh, you know, we, we, I'll interview authors, people like you that have a rich, uh, background and, and studying in a certain area, and they may come out with their, yeah, here's a FivePoint plan to consider. Or, you know, I may share an opinion about how to lead that. I think, man, like live or die like this. I know this principle is like, I'll never lead again without this principle. Right. And I always try and I, I want to give the impression to the listing, honest. Like, I hope you disagree with me sometimes, you know? 'cause that's, that's great. And, and there's greater knowledge and learning by you hearing a concept that you absolutely disagree with. What, as far as a fence that I've set up. And then you can take that back to your fence workshop and say, no, I don't like that. Right. And I, and in fact, that's gonna influence me to create this entirely different fence. And that's great because now you've found deeper inspiration and love by considering somebody else's fence and how they do things. Right.

Speaker 2 00:43:48 Perfect. I love

Speaker 1 00:43:50 That. So as far as teaching, that's, that's the thing is you don't just act like fences don't, there they aren't there, but you, uh, recognize the fences that are there. What can

Speaker 2 00:43:58 You learn from, you use the fence law lens, like just Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. If, if you're in a conversation like that and you realize, okay, we're talking about fence laws and everyone has different fence laws, and there may be some really good things I can apply and maybe I have something good to offer to someone else, that's a different framework than feeling like obligated to do every single thing. Yeah. Or I'm gonna judge everyone, which maybe that would be the next point. We should obviously not judge on anything. But I found that particularly around the area offense laws judging is really prevalent.

Hmm. And it can go both ways. Right. So maybe there's someone who's playing basketball with their kid on the front yard on Sunday, and I'm like, oh, wow. They're breaking Saturday day. They don't get it. Right. You know, or maybe there's someone else who, like, they're not watching the Super Bowl on Sunday 'cause they don't watch football on Sunday. And I'm like, oh man, this guys think they're so holy <laugh>. You know? So, uh, that kind of judgment, it can go whether someone else's fence laws are, we could say higher or stricter or looser than mine judgment, I think can often take place. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:45:00 And so it's really just getting this habit of recognizing the fence, but, you know, and then recognizing am I suddenly coming up with a judgment one way or the other? Right. Right.

Speaker 2 00:45:08 And that's, and everyone's like, I, I'm a judger, so I I will to default, you know, straight to there. And so it is, for me, it's really important to remember, okay, wait, you shouldn't judge about anything. Especially not this little detail. Yeah. Um, here's the story someone told me. Um, so I'm, I'm gonna tell you the story. Okay. Try not to judge. Okay. <laugh>. So it's, it's about a woman named Denise Denise's daughter. Jennifer was asked to prom. The problem was Jennifer turned 16, four days after prom. So Denise tells Jennifer, you can choose for yourself if you go after some deliberation. Jennifer decided to go to prom, and a few days later, the boy who invited Jennifer to, for her to prom asks, how old are you? Jennifer says, well, I'm 15, but I turned 16 four days after the prom. And the young man promptly Unin invites her from the dance.

Speaker 2 00:45:53 Hmm. So, as I've shared this story with lots of different people, it's just funny to see the judgment meter. It just picks up right away. You know, some people are like, sir Jennifer Wright, you know, that's what you get when you don't follow the prophet <laugh>. And other people judge the mom. They're like, well, why don't you do a better job teaching your child? So she'd make a good decision. And, uh, I remember one person said, well, I'm sure it wasn't the boy who wanted to uninvite the girl. It was his mother who was so judgmental. And I would not want my child to have a judgmental mother-in-law, <laugh>. You know? So, so you're like, that's

Speaker 1 00:46:22 Great.

Speaker 2 00:46:23 Yeah. You, the judges, you know, and I, I'd love to hear your thoughts on how do you do that? How do you maybe step back from this rush to judgment?

Speaker 1 00:46:32 And again, it's so difficult, but, and it seems so simplistic to say, you know, we just need to love everybody. And just, and oftentimes I find myself like, uh, one instance, I, I don't know why I was thinking about this earlier, but I've been pondering over as far as the, the word of wisdom and as far as green tea goes, and for years and years, like green tea, especially as some of these, these hip uh, health food companies have developed drinks and bars and things that have green tea in it. And over the years I've sort of like, well, I don't know. And people will say, well, actually green tea is from the leaf and not from, or I don't know,

whatever they say, like, green tea comes from the same plant as black tea. But maybe it's like from the, the root or something. I don't know.

Speaker 2 00:47:09 You should definitely do a future podcast on like, the history of how herbal tea is. Okay. And black tea's not. I would love to learn like how we, how we got there. Right. I've got to like these very nitpicky details of which t's are in and which t's are out. Yeah. I like, I honestly don't know. Right,

Speaker 1 00:47:23 Right. And, um, and let me know when you cross a scholar in your, in your office that knows, 'cause I don't know know, but, but anyways, I'm just thinking like, there's so many people right now. 'cause the church came out with a, an article in, in an official, I think it was in the enzyme or something, or, or put out something that, that clearly stated. Yeah. Green tea is definitely something that we don't consume. Right. And now I know that there's so many people sort of invested in these routines in life that there's still drinking green tea. I, and I come across 'em all the time, you know, and they're drinking something. I say, no, I don't want any, and this is the guy I go to church with or something. You know, it's like, and in my mind I'm thinking this is against the word of wisdom.

Speaker 1 00:47:58 Right. But instead, I just sort of take a deep breath and say, Hey man, like your path to Christ is, you're on your path. I'm on mine. Like, I'm just glad you're, you're here, you're my house. Or you we're doing this thing together. And just sort of going back to the root of like, he's on his path to Christ. And again, not that there're, you know, that there's different ways to Christ, but, but everybody has different life experiences, right. And so just sort of default and be like, Hey, man, like if that's, that's cool. You know, <laugh>, I don't know if that that answers your question. Yeah. But that's sort of the state of mind I get in of saying like, oh, you know, you don't, you only wear your garments on Sunday. Okay. That's how you live the gospel. Love you, man. Like, do you want to go hang out sometime? You know? And just, just like moving, recognizing their fence, but moving past it, I guess.

Speaker 2 00:48:40 Yeah. And, and somehow there's attention, especially for those who are in leadership positions between leading and teaching French principles. Because look, the reality is there are some behaviors that are not appropriate. Right. And there are better ways to live. And so trying to define the balance of when to correct and when to accept.

Speaker 1 00:48:57 Yeah. And I think that takes my mind to this other concept, someone describing me, that especially as a bishop, you feel like I am a judge in Israel, and therefore I need to be in my judge in Israel mode like 24 7, which is important to be in that mode. When you're in a temple, recommend interview. Right? Now, we get to the word of wisdom and they bring up, uh, you know, what about green tea? And you can reference maybe this, this article the church released and Right. And then there's other times where I feel like the leader needs to have take his judge of Israel hat off and just put his, his loving Christ hat on, which is really what you need to wear most of the time. Where when you're in their home or they offer you green tea, you don't jump to Oh, as your bishop, you should know that that is against the word of wisdom or whatever.

Speaker 1 00:49:34 But just be like, Hey, I'm not gonna have any, I'm good. I'm just have some water. Thanks, man. So how's your family doing? Right? So you, there's these modes where sure, there, there are moments where you have to put that judge of Israel hat on and say like, listen brother, like I can't give you this, this recommend because of A, B, and C, and let's talk about that for a minute. Right? What do you think about that? And, and start that dialogue. But, and in that leadership dynamic, it is hard to, 'cause you do have to put that judge hat on, right. Uh, when it's appropriate.

Speaker 2 00:50:00 And one of the things to me that is so interesting is we are not unique. Yeah. Like, and we've, we've shared several examples from the life of Jesus about this. It's not just our culture. Um, it was the same thing with the Apostle Paul. Let me, I'm gonna read a couple verses from Romans chapter 14. Don't judge me, but the, I'm gonna read the new revised standard version. 'cause Romans is a little

Speaker 1 00:50:20 Hard. Are, isn't there a fence somewhere that says we can't read this <laugh>? I,

Speaker 2 00:50:24 So, uh,

Speaker 1 00:50:24 Another podcast episode. Another podcast.

Speaker 2 00:50:26 Yeah. So here's Paul. He says, welcome those who are weak in the faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything while the weak only eat vegetables. Now, in context, he's not talking about vegetarianism or anything. He's like, some, some people he's saying are very concerned about what type of meat they're gonna be eating. That as it might've related to the La Moses or additional fence laws. But here's his key. Those who eat must not despise. Those who abstain. And those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of others? So, you know, in today's context, you brought up green tea, whether it's green tea or Coke, or heaven forbid, white bread. You know, like whatever types of vice that we're talking about. There's these tangential issues.

Speaker 2 00:51:18 And again, like there are some issues that are important, but white bread is not one of them. And Paul's saying, don't argue about this. A little bit later in that verse, there's this really powerful phrase that I think is so helpful. He says, for meat, destroy not the work of God. And we could insert in so many different things there for meat. It's just for whatever, like the issue is that's causing the, that love of Christ to depart from my heart and the spirit of judgment to enter. He's saying it's not worth it. So my ward, my home ward recently came up with, um, for lots of reasons, a policy of no food in church. And we could have like a conversation about like, is that a good fence law? Is that a bad fence law? But at the end of the day, like we can't let, whether we have food in church or not have food in church that can't destroy the work of God. Or the earlier example we talked about, if someone's wearing a cross necklace, don't let that destroy the work of God. There are so many things that if we're not careful, can really cause hurt feelings.

Speaker 1 00:52:20 Yeah. And I love that that phrase the work of God, because I think of it in the context of like, God's working with me. He's working with my heart. He's working with that, that individual who drinks his green tea with his protein shake every morning, like he's working with his, his heart. And the minute you come in and start spouting about your fence, and that's not right, or you know, you should be ashamed of yourself, like you're disrupting the work that God's doing in him. Like the best we can do is step back, let that work transpire, and then just love him. Now obviously if that work of God then leads him to the bishop's office where he is like, I'm ready to go to the temple Bishop, let's do this. And then that's an appropriate scenario where that, uh, can be addressed. Right? But I just love that concept of God's working with all of us and regardless of where we're at, and just recognize that, but don't disrupt it. Like don't judge, don't disrupt it with your judgment.

Speaker 2 00:53:07 I remember a story, a woman, I'll, I'll call Karen. So she joined the church when she was 20 or 21, married a return missionary, moved to a new ward, she's not grew up in the church, got a calling as a primary teacher. So she's never been to primary, but she knows it's important to love the kids. So she invites all the kids to her house for a game day. And she asked what game they wanna play. And to her surprise, none of her primary kids know how to play poker. And that was her favorite game growing up. So she teaches them all how to play

Speaker 1 00:53:34 Poker. I love this. Where this is heavy

Speaker 2 00:53:35 <laugh>. They have a great, great time playing poker <laugh>. So can you imagine like, what happens,

Speaker 1 00:53:39 The conversations, all

Speaker 2 00:53:40 These little homes, right? When the kids, what did you guys do in your primary team? We played poker. So this was the, this was a setting where there could have been judgment, anger, but I love that in this ward, there wasn't, people had the spirit of, you know what, this is great. She loves her kids. Now that does not mean that like they started singing like, Jesus wants me for a poker player. You know, they've been like, change the whole primary curriculum to

Speaker 1 00:54:03 Or take a field trip to Vegas. Yeah,

Speaker 2 00:54:04 That's right. So that doesn't mean that you have to, you know, there's just this line that you're talking about. And I love that in this case, the judgment hat was off the, I'm a lover. Like Jesus hat was on, and they could see the good in what she was doing and not get caught up and whatever the practice was. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:54:22 Yeah. And I love, I, my mind goes to the, uh, you know, when Christ is eating with the sinners and he's just sort of like, Hey, we're trying to have a good meal here. Like, if you could just <laugh> step out, this is really good food. You know,

Speaker 2 00:54:33 <laugh>. Well, you know, that, I mean, that's another example actually though in his day and time, that was a Sal's law. There were specific rules about who you could and could not eat with. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So that wasn't just like, oh, they're sitting with the unpopular kids at, at school. Like, this was actually from a Risa perspective, a violation of a fence law that was important to them. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So I, I know we talked about this at the beginning, but maybe as we kind of come towards the end of this conversation, it's also good for us to just reemphasize the importance of following prophetic fence laws. Hmm. I can see someone looking at a fence going back to our original parable in the backyard and saying like, I don't see the purpose of this fence. And we might say, well, that's the point.

Speaker 2 00:55:14 You don't see, you're not a profit seer and revelator. They see things that we don't see. Yeah. So it would be a, I think a horrible mistake for anyone. I was leading a tour in Israel one time, and as we got off the, I, we were talking about fence loss on the bus, and as we got off, I said, okay, remember kids, everyone buddy up. And one 10-year-old said to his mom, oh, that's just a fence law <laugh>, you know? And I was like, oh, no. Like we, we went beyond the mark, but the fence laws, we would definitely be going beyond the mark if we were to say, oh, I, I disregard prophetic counsel because that's just a fence law. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:55:51 Yeah. And that's the, the tricky thing is we talk about kicking down fences and, you know, it's like, well, again, we, we gotta make sure, and that's the, the power of stepping back and analyzing. Why is that fence there? Well, I don't know it why it's there, so let's kick it down. Like, no, actually, you know, president Nielsen put the fence there, so Right. Maybe we don't know why it's there, but let's just keep it there because, uh, there's a certain authority that put in place. Right.

Speaker 2 00:56:13 I mean, earlier we talked about for the strength of youth as, you know, being fence laws and like, it's true. Like, don't date till you're 16. So can you have a temple recommend if you don't date till you're 16? You actually can. So it's not a core law, but it is a fence law that prophets have put in place. President Nelson said for, he's talking to youth, he said, for the strength of youth should be your standard. It is the standard The Lord expects all his youth to uphold as your humble servant. I plead with you to study this book again, decide how you can live these standards, your standards with even more exactness. So when I hear the prophet saying that, I realize, so the, the for strengths of youth isn't a collection of optional guidelines. I can select. I'm like, this is something that the prophet is saying. And so I wanna make sure that this really emphasized that Yes, when the spirit prophet give a expense loss, we wanna follow them. That's sort of a different category from most of what we've been talking about today. Right.

Speaker 1 00:57:10 That's awesome. Have we gone through, you mentioned these four things. Have you probably taken off the mark? Have you talked, have he on these for the most part or? Yeah,

Speaker 2 00:57:18 No, I think we have, so, okay. I mean, just to kind of sum up, it's good to have spirit driven fence laws. There are some fence laws that can be burdensome. Like we wanna let go of those. We wanna make sure we have the mark loving God and loving our

neighbor. And then we talked about judging and teaching. So we wanna don't judge on fence laws. And when we're teaching, make sure that we're teaching the doctrine. Yeah. Not the fence. Nice.

Speaker 1 00:57:40 <laugh> teach the doctrine, not the fence. So I wanna, another question. I know that people are, there's a handful of people screaming at their, their iPhone right now that uh, yeah. But John, you don't understand. My bishop, all he does is build fences all day, every day. In fact, I show up to church, I'm just like, I'm squished by all these fences. I can't do anything. Like you have so many rules and policy, how can I even survive in here? So what do I do when I have a leader that's so obsessed with creating these fences that I can barely breathe in the church?

Speaker 2 00:58:08 Well, you know that, that's funny. You should ask a, a lot of times when we think about we, we hear lessons from the Last Supper with Jesus Christ. They'll talk about how Jesus says, one of you will betray me, and the disciples say, Lord, is it I? Well, that's in Matthew's account. In Luke's account. They actually say something different. The disciples say, Lord, who is it? Hmm. And I think when we have a conversation about fence laws, it's really important for us to be in the Lord. Is it I mode? Mm. If we're like, Lord, who is it? Like, okay, Lord, who do I need to send this podcast to? 'cause I know there's that bishop where there these four other people that really need this message. <laugh>. Yeah. Like, that's probably true. But for me, I think the most important thing we can do is look inward. Because if I deeply have internalized the fence law lens, and that's gonna help me, then when I go to church and someone makes a comment about how, you know, like in my, in my church or in my home, we have three hours of come follow me time, and it is really spiritual. Then instead of me feeling guilty, like, wow, that is does not describe my experience, I'm gonna be able to say, Hmm. Like, they are doing something different and that's beautiful and wonderful for them. And I'm not gonna let that drag me down. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:59:13 I'm going back to your analogy of sometimes we go to our neighbor's house, we look at their fence, we're like, that's the ugliest fence. Like how you've painted that. Like, in our mind we're thinking, that would never jive in my backyard. But you can find value in just saying, wow, what a great fence. Tell me why did you paint it like this? Like, you know, and they may say, oh, I just had this, I woke up in the middle of the night and I had this, you know, epiphany of how I should paint the fence. Like, wow, that's cool. Anyways, uh, let's get back to the barbecue. You know? Right. Like, and, and just recognizing the fence for what it is. Right. And again,

Speaker 2 00:59:40 It's different personality types. I, I'm, I'm sure that for some people they've listened to this podcast and they're like, sounds cr like, I never worry about anyone else's fences. Some people just do them and that's great. And they're very happy. And others have a, a very different personality that's focused on judging and comparing. Yeah. So I think depending on your personality type, you may have some real challenges around fence laws. But exactly what you said, I think seeing the beauty in others Yeah. But not letting that Yeah. Destroy your barbecue.

Speaker 1 01:00:04 Yeah. And oftentimes when I get these emails of like, you know, <laugh>, I'm the one guy in, you know, the, the church there where someone can email and, you know, they, they maybe should go to their stake president if they have concern about their bishop, but their stake president, he's in on it too. You know, like, he won't listen to me. So I'm gonna email this random guy who has a podcast about leadership and he'll hear me out. Right. So I get these emails and oftentimes I respond, and I know this isn't like overly helpful, but like the more upward empathy we can have to our leaders of like, wow. Like this. Yeah. I think my bishop just builds so many fences. Interesting. Like, I'm, how can I love him better? Like, how can I serve him better? How can I make his job easier? And it's hard to get there. And 'cause some people may say, but Kurt, you don't understand. These fences are on the, the verge of abuse inward. And if that's the case, like, yeah, maybe you should reach out to your stake president or authority and, and let them know the type of fences being built in your area. But 99% of the time we just, it's an opportunity for us to just show upward empathy to that leader and, uh, do our best to, to find Christ in, in, in our gospel experience. Right. Yeah.

Speaker 2 01:01:06 And maybe to see like, like we said, with that upward love to say, wow, I'm so grateful that my bishop loves me enough to care about me. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But he's worried about my spiritual growth and he's, he's trying to help me. Yeah.

Speaker 1 01:01:18 Right. Well, have we covered it all? Anything we're missing, John? I think

Speaker 2 01:01:21 That's great. No, I think at, at the end of the day, maybe we can conclude with what Mormon said. This is coming from Marna chapter seven. He said, take heed that you do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is of good and of God to be of the devil. I beseech you that you should search diligently in the light of Christ that you may know good from evil. It's definitely true that there, there's right and wrong and there's core laws. The whole of sin is real. And I wanna avoid breaking the law of chastity or breaking the word of wisdom. So fence laws can be helpful, but at the end of the day, it's the Holy Ghost that's gonna help us judge, which is right and which is wrong.

Speaker 1 01:02:08 That concludes my interview with John Hilton III. Wow. What a phenomenal discussion. Again, these are one of those discussions I sit in and we're recording and I just hope, man, I hope my recorder's working, but I just so much enjoy these conversations. I learned a ton. I hope you did too. I would love to hear your perspective as it comes to fence laws. You can go to [leading.saints.org](http://leading.saints.org) and find this episode and maybe leave a comment. I would love to hear as far as your experience with fence laws, and also we're peculiar people. Am I right? And so sometimes we have some peculiar fence laws that get put in place in different wards or, or communities or organizations. I would love to hear from the good, the bad, the ugly offense laws, what's worked for you? What hasn't worked? How have you found deeper meaning in your leadership by removing fences?

Speaker 1 01:02:53 And how have you found deeper meaning in your leadership by putting fences in place? And maybe how have you better respected and struggled to follow a leader when you felt like they were putting too many fences up? I would love to hear it. So go to



leading saints.org/contact and send me a message. I would also love to hear who else, what other concepts that sometimes there's like this, this explosion between culture and, uh, leadership sometimes in our church, right? That creates these interesting dynamics like fence law. So what other concepts, topics, things could we cover that would be interesting to explore as a leader? Maybe enhance your ability to lead? And that concludes this throwback episode of the Leading Saints podcast.

Speaker 3 01:03:56 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 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.