



## **Changing Church Culture by Gathering the Saints | An Interview with Jacob Hansen**

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Speaker 1 00:00:01 Anthony Sweat has easily become one of my favorite BYU professors to interview. He's been on the podcast several times, and he also has a remarkable presentation about ambiguity of doctrine. In our Questioning Saints virtual library, he discusses healthy and unhealthy ways we approach doctrine, how to help others reconcile doctrine they find difficult to believe, especially when we don't know much about it. You can watch Professor Sweat's entire interview in the Questioning Saints Library by going to [leading-saints.org/fourteen](https://leading-saints.org/fourteen). This will give you access for 14 days at no cost to watch this presentation. You'll be better prepared as a leader when you do.

Speaker 1 00:00:43 Hey, did you know that we video record the vast majority of our interviews on the Leading Saints podcast? That's right. And then we upload it to YouTube because we have a Leading Saints YouTube channel. And you should subscribe, especially if you're the type of person that, uh, listens to the podcast while you do the dishes or work out. You can put up the video and get the more immersive experience by seeing my beautiful mug and also the face of the various guests that are on the Leading Saints podcast. And, uh, it really helps us out to go to YouTube anyways, subscribe to the channel 'cause that helps us dial in the algorithm and reach more people and get these powerful interviews out to leaders across the world who could benefit. So go to YouTube, search for Leading Saints, find our familiar red logo and subscribe today. We're welcoming in Jacob Hansen. How are you, Jacob?

Speaker 2 00:01:41 Doing all right. Thanks for having me, Kurt.

Speaker 1 00:01:43 Cool. Now, uh, people may be familiar with, with you and your content as you run the Thoughtful Faith, uh, YouTube channel. Uh, where else do people see your, your perspectives online?

Speaker 2 00:01:53 Yeah, primarily definitely the YouTube channel. I do have a website, thoughtfulfaith.com. I, I used to post more like blogs on there. I don't do that as much anymore. And then I do have a Facebook group that I moderate, which can get pretty wild 'cause I kind of maintain it as <laugh> pretty free speech kind of place. So yeah, while it's called Thoughtful Saints on Facebook, it's one that, again, if you're gonna join it, just beware. It's a, it gets a little wild <laugh>. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:02:20 Well that's the nature of, of Facebook, right? I think I sometimes worry some people say, Hey, you know, look at our society where we're so divided and, but it's like when we go to the grocery store or church or, you know, we're not like screaming at each other. I think it's just the nature of these platforms. Sometimes they bring out the worst of people at times. And so, you know, you kind of, there's some strong discussion sometimes on these platforms when in reality it's maybe not as divisive as, as we think it'll be anyway.

Speaker 2 00:02:46 Yeah, whenever I, whenever I talk to people in person, it's always like, it's really funny to watch how we both are kinda like, uh, okay. Like, we'll, we'll, we'll cool this off a little bit. It's kinda like, you ever seen that video of the two dogs that are like barking at each other from behind the fence and as Tuesday open the fence, the dogs are like, stop barking and just kinda like, look at each other.

Speaker 1 00:03:04 You're not, you're not that bad. Yeah. <laugh>. Yeah. That's cool. Now, one part of your channel I, I appreciate is the, the debate factor. Like, you're open to really debating ideas and really being pushed on your perspectives or, or if people put up a strong opinions, which they do on the internet, <laugh>, it's good, you know, you'll, you'll be willing to push back there and, and that debate dynamic, I think we're just really losing it, right?

Speaker 2 00:03:27 Yeah, I, I'm a big fan of formal debates. I actually tell people that one of the things that helped save my testimony was watching YouTube debates of atheists, uh, against various Christian apologists. And while I have theological differences with a lot of those Christian apologists, they changed. I don't know, there was just an impression in my mind that kinda like, you know, they put out there kind of the, the religious people. They're kind of the ignorant ones and it's like these really smart, scientifically minded people, you know, the atheists that are the really intelligent ones. And I remember just watching the debates and just being blown away at how intellectually rigorous some of these Christians were and just the, the Christian tradition is and or can be. And I generally say it was the thing I think that saved me from kind of going down the atheist route that my brothers went down.

Speaker 2 00:04:19 And so I being kind of a fan of debates and, and seeing how they can kind of, because you only anyone can hang out in their echo chamber and talk to the people who think like them, right? The real question is, is how well can your ideas hold up when they go toe to toe with someone who disagrees with you in a forum that is balanced? I, I, I often say that

the fights that we have on Facebook or Twitter or whatever, it's kinda like a street fight <laugh>. It's like, yeah, you got like 20 friends on one side who all jump in and gang up on somebody where like a debate is like a boxing match. You know, it's two people equal amounts of time to make your points to cross-examine one another. And I just think when you put ideas in that sort of a format where it's one-on-one, let's see who can present their idea better, you can really start to see what ideas hold strength and which ones fall apart.

Speaker 1 00:05:11 Yeah. And you learn so much from that when you hear them put these things up side by side rather than, you know, like you said, these silos that are out there that you can deep dive on any topic. And our cognitive bias will lead us in a direction where it's like, yeah, you see I am. Right. Well, yeah, that's what the, your cognitive bias is constantly looking for, and that's a safe place to be. But when you really sit in the tension of some of these discussions, you can really decide where you stand on it, and it's really helpful.

Speaker 2 00:05:38 Yeah. And it's very easy for people to put the best argument against the worst argument within a particular forum. I wanna see the best argument from both sides. Yeah. It's kinda like, you know, you have Mike Tyson go fight a 15-year-old, it's like obviously he's going to like destroy him, right? But if you put Mike Tyson against the other best fighter, right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, if you put ideas that are, we, we live in a battlefield of ideas. So like, put the two best ideas argued by the most intelligent, strongest proponents of their cause, put them together and say, okay guys, let's give you equal time. And I think that's why the format matters, give you equal time, equal kind of presentation ability. And then let's see, who can convince the audience that their point of view is stronger? And I, I just feel like I'm not interested in silos.

Speaker 2 00:06:26 You don't find the truth there. There's the, I actually, I, I love, uh, Jared Halverson, I have a little point of disagreement. I, I think what he says about the proving contraries thing, I like where he goes with it. But I think if you actually look at what Joseph was talking about when he was talking about proving contraries, he was talking to someone about a book they were writing, comparing different sort of religious traditions and like, they were writing a history essentially of all these different faith groups. And Joseph was saying, look, when you get different ideas together, these different contraries, and you prove them, which in that language of that time was kind of like, try them. Like see how strong they are. The truth is made manifest. And so we have to get the contraries together in order to see what the truth is. That contrast is what creates clarity. Yeah. And so I, I don't know, in my channel, that's kind of what I hope to do is kind of provide, you know, don't hide in a silo. I'm not just gonna, I'm, I'm gonna talk to people who very much disagree with me. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:07:28 And I'm, I'm curious like with, you know, this debate format, it's because I just think of myself like, I appreciate watching it now stepping into that ring, that's maybe something else that, I mean, that's intense. It's like, it's one thing to be at the gym and be like, yeah, I'm probably stronger than that guy. But it's like, well, why don't you guys test step into a ring and actually find out? I was like, well, I mean, I'm good, I'm good. Like, I just wanna sort of monitor. But I mean, would you recommend most people step into a debate? Even it's, if it's more of a casual, you know, Thanksgiving dinner type of debate?

Speaker 2 00:08:00 Actually, no. <laugh>. Okay. Two things. Number one, it's very much, I think the, the, like boxing or MMA analogy is very much it. Like, I think you should work out at the gym, do all that stuff. That doesn't mean that you should, like, it's your thing to get into a ring and slug it out. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Right. But I think you need to have people that can do that, right? Yeah. And I think the people that do feel like they could, that understand rhetoric and debate and how to make arguments and that kind of thing, like they should use that talent to help put out good arguments for the church. And if you can do it in writing, and I will say debate, like actual formal debate, it is a skillset. Just because somebody loses the the debate doesn't mean that they were wrong. Right.

Speaker 2 00:08:39 It doesn't mean that. And so, yeah, I wouldn't advise everyone to it, and I don't advise people, like, debate is not the way you minister to people. <laugh>. You have to understand, I, I make a distinction between what I call public advocacy versus private ministry. Like, if I wanna actually minister to someone, debate is the last thing I want to do that'll only cause problems. Right? But if I'm engaging in the public square, in the public forum where I'm not actually trying to convince the person that I'm arguing with, it's the audience that's watching. They're the jury. It's like thinking that someone was in a trial for something and that they were gonna convince the defense that they were right. Like, that's not, you're convincing the jury. And when you're in the public square, there's a jury watching. And if we don't ever defend our beliefs in the public square, then the other side controls the public narrative as to who we are, what we think.

Speaker 2 00:09:36 And ultimately that hurts the ability for the church to grow. And I'm not saying that we need to like, obviously pick your battles and, and we don't like people don't brought to the gospel necessarily because of the arguments that are made in some debate. But Elder Maxwell, he was fond of quoting Austin Farr who said that essentially though argument does not create conviction and belief, and I'm kind of paraphrasing here, a lack of argument destroys the climate where belief can flourish. Like you have to create a climate where people can actually come to believe. And if you don't have anyone defending these beliefs rationally, then why would a rational person ever believe in them?

Speaker 1 00:10:20 Yeah. That's really powerful. And this may be a discussion I want to get to our subject at hand, but maybe a discussion for a future is, and I've done some writing and thinking about it, is this concept of, you know, we have a deep tradition in our faith of being spiritual confirmation, but I don't think we often calculate in that that cognitive bias that our brain is trying to do at the same time. And so sometimes we misinterpret cognitive bias for a spiritual prompting, like, oh, this, this debate is feeling uncomfortable. Or like, I don't like that they're bringing that up. And so that must be the spirit telling me like, no, no, no, like that your brain is resisting that because maybe that's outside the framework that you've built, but it's healthy to sit in that at times and let that process, and of course the spirit's in that. But I think we sometimes default to the, oh, you know, I feel uncomfortable. That must mean that the spirit is left or that we, we shouldn't continue this conversation. But, so it's, it's a, I think there's, there's more going on in our brain spiritually and physically that we don't consider.

Speaker 2 00:11:17 Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. So

Speaker 1 00:11:19 Recently you, I guess you were on, uh, word Radio first discussing this, and then you did a, a more formalized thought through, uh, video on your channel about the

Speaker 2 00:11:30 Interest-based programs,

Speaker 1 00:11:31 Interest-based programs. Okay. And, and this, as you were talking through this, I thought, man, this is such in the vein of leading Saints and 'cause really at the end of the day, what we're trying to do at Leading Saints, you know, some people misinterpret us like we're some type of Franklin Covey organization that wants to train all the leaders. Like, no, no, no. Like, that's not our role or prerogative. But what we'd like to do is put up examples of individuals who've maybe tried something different or approach their congregation in a way that's really stimulated healthy culture. And the more I, those ideas we can put out there, then suddenly leaders around the world listening to this think, think, well, maybe I could do that. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so this approach, this, this idea, uh, I think is a, a broader idea that we've sort of tried to be the promoting in the world of leading saints for years. But I think you put it really succinct in that, and I, and we'll link to the video, people can go watch it. But maybe give us a, just a, a good summary of the points you were making in that video.

Speaker 2 00:12:23 Yeah, so I think the, it all kind of started when I, I was thinking about what works in the church. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Like there are some things that work that they really create positive experiences that when we look back in the church and we think about our experiences, and you were to ask people like, what are the things that really impacted you that you remember? Yeah. And I know that for a lot of people, including family members of mine, one of them that, uh, impacted us was the scouting program, but more specifically certain scout events. Yeah. Right. It was the big stuff. It was the high adventure trips, especially were the ones that we all talk about. And remember, another one that people talk a lot about is basketball, like church basketball, <laugh> or church sports that people did. And besides any of the like, funny things about people getting mad at each other at church ball or whatever fight, like, like that kind of stuff.

Speaker 2 00:13:14 Oh, it just kind of like, anyway, there's a whole discussion you could have about how I were overly sensitive about that. But what I found is I started to notice a pattern. And what it was is that it was things that people are interested in. Like when you take the gospel and you combine it with something that someone is interested in, something happens. And as I thought more about that, I realized that in the church, we are surrounded by people who share our values. Like there's no doubt about that. And that's great and we all love that. But is sharing values with someone, does that really, is that enough to create a deep and meaningful connection with people? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> it isn't. Right? Because I know tons of people who share my values, but they have, they have none of my interests and I love them.

Speaker 2 00:13:56 And they're my fellow brothers and sisters. And, and I, I love that they share my values, but where the real magic happens is when somebody shares your values and your interests. Right? Yeah. And that's the reason that, and I, I use this in the video, like think about it. If you were to ask a boy, to be really honest, if he has a greater level of brotherhood

with his football team or with his priest quorum, he's probably gonna say with his football team. Those are the guys that he's like, has arms around like, we won the championship, you know, <laugh>. And, but the problem is those boys might not share his interests. Yeah. Or I'm sorry, they, they share his interests, but they might not share his values.

Speaker 1 00:14:32 Right. And that's where a lot of trouble can arise. Right? That's where the parents worry.

Speaker 2 00:14:36 Yes. And where you get the real magic. And, and we have this concept in the church, and I began to think more about it. I was like, we have a concept in the church of gathering the saints. Like there's a reason that Joseph Smith didn't leave the church members all isolated in their little enclaves. He called them to come together as a group of saints. That is what formed us as a people. That's like why we are who we are today. And we are very distinct for that reason because we gathered and we're supposed to build Zion within our own stakes in the stakes of Zion. So my thought is, is it's like, why don't we, and there are many things that we do that are great. Like I'm not bagging on the church here. What I'm saying though is that why don't we capitalize on these things that actually work?

Speaker 2 00:15:20 And I'm not providing any sort of a, a particular program. And I say that in the video, I'm providing a paradigm that says, look, we often at the ward level struggle because you have a ton of people who share the same values, but you only have small groups that maybe share the same interests. But if you zoom out to the stake level or to a regional level, you can get the people together who share similar interests as well. Yeah. And so why are we doing activities at the ward level where we're struggling to get, you know, the kids to be interested in, or maybe one of them's interested and then the others aren't where if we met, went up a level like, let the kids who love basketball play basketball. Let the kids who love choir and the drama program at school that are already doing that, have them gather with other saints who love that as well. And like, who are the friends that I have to this day? They're the guys that I met at BYU who love the gospel and love to surf. And that's where the magic happens. So it's like, if we know where the magic happens, why don't we think about ways to leverage what actually works?

Speaker 1 00:16:29 Yeah. And, and I appreciate this dichotomy of value, looking at it as values and interests. 'cause oftentimes just for a practical reason, obviously the values are there for a typical war because it's a religion. And typically religions are based on morality and and values. Right. So that sort of comes naturally in this discussion. But out of practicality, we've gathered people from values and geographics. You happen to be in my word boundaries. So we gather, and some people, you know, will say that's actually an awesome thing about our church is that we, we have mixed uh, perspectives at times. Right. And

Speaker 2 00:17:01 I agree. Let me actually make a quick caveat here. Okay. 'cause I think it's very important people understand this. I am not saying that the church should modify all of its programs to simply be interest based. Like I think that that would be a major mistake. Right. But I think that what are, like for instance, a temple trip, right? Like that should be a ward thing. Yeah. Right? And I think that you should gather with people that don't share your interests, right.

Around like whatever things, because that's a, I put it this way, ministry should happen at the ward level because that's where sort of, it doesn't matter who you are, you minister to everyone. But if I'm going to put together a basketball game, why would I try and force people to play basketball that don't want to play basketball? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, right? Mm-Hmm.

Speaker 2 00:17:46 <affirmative>. Like it depends on, you have to look at the activity and say, is this a ministry? You know, a service project? Of course ward level, wonderful. A Christmas party. You know, you don't need to, like, who doesn't love a Christmas party? Right? You don't need to do that at stake level. Do it at the ward level. Right. Or the trunk or treat like great. Like there are all sorts of things that we can do there. But I just think that if we were to, this idea of forcing people and obligating people to go to activities is sort of a weird concept. It's like, why don't we provide activities and then let the people that are interested come. And by the way, if you can't find anyone who's interested in your activity, then don't do that activity. That's a stupid activity. Like, actually, like that's, that's a reflection on you, not on them if you can't do something that they're actually interested in.

Speaker 2 00:18:33 And so, in my mind, their ministry is something we call people to do. Yeah. You know, a basketball game, why force the kid who genuinely, like, there's a kid in my ward, I know for a fact the reason that he doesn't go to basketball is 'cause it isn't because he like, isn't a participator or whatever is 'cause he is genuinely embarrassed. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Like, he goes out there and he feels like he looks like a fool. And to be honest, he kind of does. 'cause he <laugh> it's not his thing. Yeah. So why not find something that he would love? And we, we, we often do this at the word love. You're like, oh, well let's, let's see if we can find an activity that he likes. Oh great. So then you put on that activity and he's the only one who shows up because no one else cares about that thing. And it's like, we can fix this problem. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Anyway, I kinda went on a little tangent there.

Speaker 1 00:19:15 <laugh>. No. Yeah. That's helpful. And a few forces here that I like sneak their way in here and sort of messed this up is this, I think of the dynamic of tradition, right? It's like, well, you know, Jacob, we've always done that chili cookoff in the fall and you know, that's where our, a good chunk of our budget's going. And so, I mean, we can't count. Like this is just an opportunity to maybe step back and say the tradition was great, but like, we're not maybe considering the interests in there. We we're gathering people of certain values geographically, but nobody sat down and said is, I mean everybody, I guess Scott has got to eat, right? So let's do a chili cookoff. But I think there's a deeper dynamic and a gathering, a Zion building effort we can do when we step back and, and take those extra steps of figuring out the interests that are in the room. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:19:57 And people are different. We always talk about the fact that we're all different. You know, we all have this stuff. It's like, exactly. The problem is though, is that you have different groups of people, right? You have the kid who's really into one thing, or the adults that are really into one thing, but not another. Right? But when we start to gather those groups together, now they should gather kind of as saints, just because they're saints to do ministry, service, ordinances, all of that kind of stuff. That's where we gather as saints in priesthood oriented sort of functions. But Zion is not just a society who gets together once a week to take

the sacrament or go to the temple. We are a group of people who interact on all sorts of things. And we need to stop thinking that we can't gather into sort of sub interest groups because we already do. And that creates community around those things. You know what I'm saying? It just, you can create human connection. And that's sort of the real thing that, that I'm driving at here with all of it. It isn't about entertaining people. Okay. This is one thing I want people to understand. This is not just about going out and entertaining people. If you can go and entertain yourself in the world, it's not <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:21:06 Right? Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:21:06 It's about creating connections between the saints and especially for men. Although this also happens with women, but I, I speak more towards men 'cause I've been more familiar with that world, is we create connections with one another. Not by getting around and talking about things, but when we get together and do something that we have a shared passion for, guys won't even say a word. You'll have two guys who are best friends. They'll go on some fishing trip, they'll talk for like five minutes on the whole trip. They'll come home and be like, that was the best trip ever. Yep. With my boys. And we were fishing and like for a lot of women is just like, I don't even know. Like, what are you talking about <laugh>? But it's like, that's what we do. But all of us do that. If you get people who share interests and values and they get together and do something that they're passionate about. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:21:54 Game changer. It's huge. It's huge. So take me to, and maybe we can kinda unpack this together as far as like, I think a, a leader listening to this would, like, I, okay, I get it. But, but what does that look like? What would you suggest to a elders quorum president, a bishop, a stake president, Relief Society president, like to actually, what are the first few steps of implementing something like this?

Speaker 2 00:22:14 Well, first I would say start small. Start very small. And it also, again, it has to be what is the appropriate level to do the activity, right? If you're at the ward level, and I have a priest quorum and I have eight boys who come and all eight of those boys have very different interests. I'm sorry. You're just not going to be able to create very many really solid interest based activities. It's going to be very difficult, right? So it has to go up the chain. But if you do find people that have shared interests, try and create an activity regularly or something based around that. Now I generally geared this more towards stake level leaders. I'm not saying it can't happen at the ward level, right? It can, but it's a little more challenging. At the stake level though. You have a lot of people and at that level you can find a group of people to do things.

Speaker 2 00:23:06 And again, start small. Here's an example. Why not have a women's yoga night once a month? I use that example in the video, right? I guarantee you in the stake there's a whole bunch of women who love yoga and you get 'em all together. But this is the other thing I would say too. You don't want this just to be entertaining. You wanna incorporate the gospel in it. And there needs to be some kind of a gospel element. There needs to be a spiritual thought or you know, something from come follow me. Or, you know, it doesn't have to be huge, but something that incorporates the gospel. Have the missionaries come and share that spiritual thought that that way they could potentially get to know people who you know, and



they can let people know if you're not a member of our faith, like we'd love to talk to you, love to learn more. And then you have a sister who's coming, or a lady who's coming over and over to this yoga night and she's not a member, but she just loves yoga. And she's friends with a couple of ladies in there. And all of a sudden she, she hears the missionaries over and over saying, Hey, if you're ever interested in hearing from us, and all of a sudden one day she's like, you know what? I really like you guys. Maybe I do wanna learn about your faith. Right?

Speaker 1 00:24:02 Yeah. Or, or I would say even the fact of that this gets this individual walking into our buildings. Like, oh, you guys got a gym in here. Oh wow. Like, where's your chapel? Or do you meet in the gym? Or, oh, let me show you that room. Right? Like just these more organic connections. And she may come for two, three years and then let's say she has a, a husband die. And then she's in this place of like, ah, like I'm, I'm yearning for God I should reach out to Jill that I met at yoga night. And you know, that's sort of when these things happen, right?

Speaker 2 00:24:29 Yep. And so I've thought, now here's the other thing. I talk about this in the video. I am, a lot of the leaders are gonna have this thing of like, man, this sounds like a lot of work. I'm doing this stuff. Number one, start small. Number two, think bottom up. Don't think top down, okay, you don't have to impose this. Like, did you have to go and tell the men in your stake, Hey, you guys should start doing basketball at 6:00 AM on uh, on Wednesday nights each week. Or you know, every mor or on every Wednesday morning. Yeah, no, they came to you and they were like, can we use the gym?

Speaker 1 00:25:01 We need a key Right?

Speaker 2 00:25:02 <laugh>, we just need a key. Like, let us in. We'd love to do this. Right? Yeah. Now the problem is, is that there is no involvement religiously as it were when it's totally informally done. Right? So why not sort of combine that into, hey, if you have a program you'd like to do, come talk to us about it. Or I would even, I'm kind of a nerd in like forms and stuff. I'd be like, look, submit to us an outline. You have to say, who are the three people that will lead this? Who are the 20 people who have said that they will do it? And then what is this program and how will you incorporate the gospel into it and say, we have a certain number of these sorts of programs we're gonna implement into our stake this year. And we just wanna start hearing from members of our stake if you have something.

Speaker 2 00:25:47 But just know there's only, we have to really limit this, but we'd like to, you know, start to hear people's ideas. And maybe you don't get it out to everybody or ask everybody for that. But in some way you, you start to get out like, Hey, what do you guys think? And I think that you'll find people that will come to you and they will say, here's what we wanna do. I will lead it. I love doing this. Like if they started a, a juujitsu night and open mat, which is a very common thing in jiujiitsu gyms in our stake. First of all, I'd be there in a heartbeat. Number two, I would, I would help run it. I would lead it. I probably would involve non-members from my gym who are higher belt level in Jiujiitsu than me. 'cause I'm not that high of a belt level to help like teach the basic class that these guys come to. I'm telling you, you'd get guys there. Yeah. And it would be fun. Yeah. Right. We'd have a great time. It'd be something I'd look forward to

every month. And how much trouble is that from the stake leaders? Like how much work, extra work do you have to do? Nothing. Like just get out of our way. Give it, just say, yeah, you can use the gym for it. Go for it.

Speaker 1 00:26:46 Yeah. Yeah. And I'm glad you're highlighting this. 'cause that's where a lot of leaders will go of like, oh, like one more thing. Like, or what if people bring me 10 things they wanna do? Like there's no pressure for a bishoprick to even, you don't gotta preside over these things. Or you put people in charge and sure there's gonna be outlier activities that maybe a red flag comes up and you're like, okay, let's, let's talk about this. But generally speaking, these are self-sustaining. And I love this dynamic of it brings people to the surface ready to engage in ways that maybe they're kind of, you know, they're, they're teaching the primary class here and yeah, they'll, they'll chip in and do it, but they're not really excited about that. But then suddenly they're super engaged in the context of church because they, something in their interest is have piqued their engagement. And now they're, and then that brings in all sorts of people that you could never get to some of these other activities or, or church services that we put on. Right?

Speaker 2 00:27:35 Absolutely. And think about it, what happens with the trunk or treat, you get a bunch of non-members who show up. What happens when we do basketball, a bunch of non-member show up? Do we actually want to like, try and find people? Because I'll tell you right now, you guys go knock on everybody's doors and do that. It's very, very difficult. I'm not saying it never works, I'm just saying that we're trying to find ways to actually reach people in the 21st century. Like we're doing missionary work the same way you did it in, you know, 1845 <laugh>. And like society has changed. Like back then people were like, you'd give them an advertisement, they'd be like, this is really cool, I'm gonna read it. You know, it's like people were like bored. And so they, they would do that. Nowadays they are hyperstimulated, but what people are is they're also disconnected. People are looking for a chance to, like, everybody has a passion. Everybody has it. Mm-Hmm. Absolutely. Members, non-members. Absolutely. If you tap into that, if you say, come gather with us, we also love this wholesome passion that you have this good thing that you love. Whether it's that it's athletics or outdoor adventures or cooking or, you know, ballroom dancing. I don't even know <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:28:40 Right? Yeah. There's

Speaker 2 00:28:41 A million things. Yeah. And there are tons of people in our community who would love to come and participate. Yeah. And it's like, if come gather with us, be with us. And you know, what happens with that? You spread the gospel. That's why non-members, when they go to BYU schools, like a huge percentage of men up getting baptized Mm-Hmm. 'cause they've gathered with the saints doing things that they're interested in.

Speaker 1 00:29:00 Yeah. I think that community dynamic is really important because, you know, even a, a ward may think like, okay, we could do a yoga yoga night, but I'm pretty sure only two of 'em and would show. But again, the, the churches just sort of giving this backbone of like, of the structure. Like, we just need a gym. Can we use the gym? Great. And we'll announce it in church, everything. But then you put it in the, the local Facebook group. Hey, we're doing a

free yoga morning here. Uh, feel free to come. And then suddenly you have 10 women there. Right. And it doesn't have to be heavy handed or the missionaries don't have to be there. But again, we're just stimulating community, gathering people again with the saints. And good things come from that.

Speaker 2 00:29:34 Yeah. And I'm, and I've said in my video, this isn't some ploy to get people baptized. Right? Yeah. It's meant to be manipulated. If you just just come and you just play basketball with us, Hey, we love you, we love having you with us. You're a great person. Like, I'm all about making friends with people. But I also do believe that what we're doing is we're bringing the spirit and bringing the spirit into someone's life that is a victory in and of itself. 'cause that's all we can do. All we can do is bring the spirit into people's lives and then they choose how they respond to it. And I think that it's undeniable that you will bring the spirit into people's lives. I know, like high adventure trips, for instance, the best missionary sort of experiences I've almost ever seen were on those trips when non-members would come along.

Speaker 2 00:30:19 'cause they'd come along. And I don't care who you are when you're in nature and by the fire looking up at the stars and you start talking about like, what's life all about? Some of these kids have never had a conversation like that in their entire lives. And all of a sudden they go, wow, I didn't even thought about this. And they feel the spirit. Now how do they respond to it? That's up to them. But all we can do is facilitate the opportunity for people to feel the spirit, and then they will respond to it accordingly. And our hope is, is that they will choose to respond to it appropriately and want to learn more. But again, it's not, that isn't the goal, right? The goal is just to be with these people and to love them. Because when we love people, that's where the spirit is. And that's it. That's a goal in and of itself.

Speaker 1 00:31:04 Yeah. And I, and I appreciate this, you know, again, this isn't primarily some ploy to, to up our missionary effort or, or baptisms. But again, it's a, it's, there are additional offerings here where you think of, you know, the average, maybe Bishop Rick thinks of maybe the, the less active family, or that even that family who maybe removed their names from the records. And sometimes there's this awkward, oh, we gotta, we gotta go knock on their door. And then all we have to offer is like, well, are you gonna join us on Sunday <laugh>? For a lot of people that's like, no way you, you couldn't dragged me to that chapel. Right? But, but if we have these variety of offerings of saying like, Hey, we're not you, do you, you do your life. But we're getting together. Like even last week in my ward, a couple guys, including myself, got a bunch of men together and we had a wings night where we tasted different hot sauces. It was so like neutral and welcoming. We didn't even talk about the gospel. And it's like, why don't just come eat wings with us? And again, this is stimulating community regardless if it ends up in a baptism or not. And in our communities, we blessed for

Speaker 2 00:32:01 It. And that community in and of itself is a goal. Yeah. Like that is a goal. Now I think that obviously they're sort of good, better, best, right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, maybe you're not gonna be able to get the best, but should you try and at least get the good Yeah. Should, is it better that that like brother is coming to the wings night, even if he's not coming to church, right? It's like, of course

Speaker 1 00:32:23 That's a huge win.

Speaker 2 00:32:24 Is it better that we have non-members at our activities than we don't? Of course. And it comes to one of those things, like, imagine, and this is kind of overwhelm people start small, but think about the vision of where this could go. Imagine if on the stake website, there's just like a list of like all these awesome things. Everything from like the annual play to like the rock climbing club, to like the JiuJitsu group. You know, it's like if you have a non-member friend, you now have just find out what they're into. And the chances are we have something in the church that they're interested in. Yeah. And again, not to say that, oh, it's like, oh yeah, we're gonna secretly baptize this guy. It's like, no, we're becoming friends with more people. We're gathering people together in love and harmony because it's just like the football team example with the priest, right?

Speaker 2 00:33:18 When he goes and gathers with the football team who share his interests, but they don't share his values, we worry about the influence that those kids will have on him. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> on the other hand, the exact opposite is true. If we say, come and gather with us. Come and belong. Come and be part of our family. Even if you're not baptized, even if you're less active, even if you're an ex-member of the church, we can still be friends with you. And I think that that creation of community is part how we build the kingdom of God on earth. And so this isn't about entertaining people, it's about connecting people. And at the center of the gospel, John 17 is my favorite chapter in all of scripture. 'cause I think it's where Jesus sort of lays out what this is all about. Ultimately, he says it's about being one with God and one with each other.

Speaker 2 00:34:15 Okay? It's about like, why are we sealing ourselves to each other? The thing that matters most to everybody, the most valuable thing you have in your life are relationships. It's your relationship with your spouse, your relationship with your children, your relationship with God, your relationship with your friends. That's the why. That's why we do all of this. And so anytime we have the ability to build healthy relationships with people inside the church, outside the church, like, let's do that. And when you take people's values and their interests and you get them together and have them engage together in something they're passionate about, beautiful things come out of it. Yeah. And so it's like, why aren't we, like, again, I'm not providing a program per se, I'm providing a paradigm for how to think about what actually has worked and why it's worked so that we can figure out ways. 'cause I don't have all the answers like it, it requires each of us to use our own creativity to figure these things out. But we have to know what the end is that we're trying to get to and how to get there. And that's what I'm trying to just frame the way that we think about it so that that way we can replicate what has already worked in the church and made us us so unique as a people. Yeah. Anyway, long, long ran. It's powerful.

Speaker 1 00:35:40 <laugh>. No, it's great. I, I appreciate you going into that. I want take it off. Like I wanna address any excuse or concern that maybe leaders have out there. And so I'm just gonna throw these at you and you can bat 'em down. Like, Jacob, what about the budget? We don't got the budget for these things. What would you say? There

Speaker 2 00:35:54 Is a legitimate question about that, but I would say that a lot of these things don't require a lot of budget. Right, exactly. <laugh>,

Speaker 1 00:36:00 Like a yoga night or morning or Juujitsu, you know?

Speaker 2 00:36:03 Yeah. Like, like

Speaker 1 00:36:04 Open the gym.

Speaker 2 00:36:05 They start, start with the ones that don't require a budget. <laugh>. Like Yeah. Like you can do that. And for the ones that do, and this may get a little craz or a little more radical, and I know that there's something about like fundraising outside the church or whatever. There's a way I think, and again, this is just me brainstorming, is what if the organization, like the group, you say, okay, your group isn't officially affiliated with the church in any way that gives you the ability to fundraise, right? Because you're not a church organization, but the church is going to allow you to use the gym or whatever, right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, it's as if there is an outside organization that the church is merely allowing to utilize the gym or to utilize some facility, right? So it's kinda like the Boy Scout model is sort of what that is. That was an outside entity, could do all of its own fundraising, kind of independent, but the church would in some way facilitate it. Is that possible? I don't know. But I'm, I'm getting a little bit more out there with like, all right, if we're gonna be created to try and figure things out, I think that we, we potentially can.

Speaker 1 00:37:01 Yeah. I think most people will find the vast majority of the ideas that come into the surface cost little to nothing to facilitate. And I would, you know, a part of this, you know, I just think of this is maybe an opportunity for leaders to see what, where the budget's going. Step back and say, what could we take away? Because I know you would be shocked and you know, I've been in bishop, different bishop Ricks and things, and I know you have two Jacob, where I think a lot of members would be shocked how much like the Christmas party costs the ward and for just like, doilies and cold ham. You know, it's like, what if we readdress that? I'm sure, I'm sure we gotta get together something around the holidays, that's fine. But I would trade the entire Christmas party for 10 of these things happening year round. Like it would be transformational from a cultural and a community dynamic that you can have the Christmas party budget. If, if we can really make some headway on this.

Speaker 2 00:37:51 Yeah. I think you can get creative with the budgets, obviously, but I will say that if something costs a lot of money, it does create an additional challenge. And you may have to get creative in, in how it's done. I've had a lot of people say, well, why don't we do these things just outside the church entirely. Uhhuh <affirmative>. Right. I've heard a lot of people bring that up. Because the point is, is that if it's done in the context of the church with the saints gathering together, we actually are creating community around the church and the gospel. And that matters. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, right? Like, yeah, you can go, anyone can go out and start a whatever soccer club. But the idea is we're gathering saints together. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, right?

Speaker 1 00:38:31 Yeah. Yeah. So that, that leads into maybe the next concern people have. Like Jacob, I tried this, my bishop said, no, I can do it. I could just couldn't get the, the leadership behind me. And so what would you say to that person?

Speaker 2 00:38:43 Well, one thing you might consider is maybe your idea was a bad idea. <laugh>, right? Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:38:48 Or really expensive.

Speaker 2 00:38:49 I do think, and I I've had to think of this 'cause it is, I think a challenge is that some people will bring up ideas that are just stupid and won't work <laugh>, and then they're gonna be all, you know, upset that their idea didn't get chosen. So that's one thing. Sure. Is maybe the, the ship had a legitimate reason why, why they shouldn't have done your idea. But the other is, yeah. I mean, you will have a challenge with leaders that will wanna bat this down. Now, I also think we need to be aware that we don't need to be commanded in all things. If you have a particular stewardship, remember you are already called on. Like some people have been like, well this is like a big change. It's not a change at all. Is there some big change that the guys go and play basketball at 6:00 AM at the church?

Speaker 2 00:39:31 No, we're already doing this kind of stuff. It's not, it can all fit so far as I can tell, within the existing rubrics of doing activities in the church. The only thing that's really changing here, like the stake is supposed to put on activities, wards are supposed to put on activities regions, I think even to some extent or to put on some kind of activities or programs. And this isn't within the framework of doing that. I'm just saying why don't we do it in a way that's more effective? Yeah. Right. That's what I'm saying. I'm not here advocating for some new program that's gonna require first presidency approval. I'm saying, why don't we, within the current guidance that we have in the handbook, just do it more effectively. Right. Isn't a handbook that says you can't have a, you know, a <laugh>, a cooking group that meets at somebody's house once a month to learn to cook a new dish.

Speaker 1 00:40:17 That's right. As long as you don't do it at the church and cook, you can only warm up at the church. And

Speaker 2 00:40:20 I know lawyers ruin everything. <laugh>

Speaker 1 00:40:24 Any other like concerns or challenges that I haven't brought up that come to mind for you?

Speaker 2 00:40:29 Yeah. Liability stuff. People picking that up. Oh yeah. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> for different activities and I mean, I don't wanna say like audited, forget that. I mean, obviously like, yeah, you gotta, you can't do things that are extraordinarily dangerous, but think about the things we're already doing. Okay. Like basketball has a liability to it. People can get hurt playing basketball. People can get hurt on a high adventure trip. You know what I mean? Like, these things do exist. In fact, people have gotten hurt. So how do you deal with liability? Well, how does anyone deal with liability? How do we have clubs anywhere? You have people sign a form that says they waive liability. Like are we really gonna act like with the army

of lawyers who are like in every stake presidency in the church, <laugh>, that we can't figure out how to put together a simple waiver that protects the church from things?

Speaker 2 00:41:19 Or you do something that is officially outside the church, you distance it from the church, right? So it's its own thing. And then the church just in some way like allows this outside entity or group to utilize some sort of facility or, or we at least announce it and make, let people know, promote, Hey, in our community there's this thing that a bunch of the members of our stake do. We'd love to encourage you guys to attend with them. You know what I mean? So there's a way you can sort of create levels of, of separation potentially. But again, that's a question you talk to an attorney about and get creative, you know what I mean? Like, we were the people who crossed the planes and built cities in the desert. Okay. <laugh>, we can figure out how to put on an annual tennis tournament. <laugh>. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Okay. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> like our ancestors would be ashamed of us <laugh> when they see how just ridiculously not creative and on top of things that we could be, especially in, in our age with all of our technology and comfort. Yeah,

Speaker 1 00:42:26 It's true. I agree. I agree. And what else are we missing?

Speaker 2 00:42:31 I think we've pretty much hit on it. I I would just say that kind of in closing, that the point of this is not the activities themselves. Okay. I think if we're going to try and bring this idea, we need to stop talking about the specific program per se. First you need people to understand the vision. Okay. The vision. We can figure out the specifics and, and that has to happen and it can be challenging. But to get buy-in, people need to understand, okay, this is worth doing. Like the people who crossed the planes didn't know all the details, okay? They had to figure 'em out, but they understood the vision of what they were doing and that's why they were willing to do it. When people want to do something, they'll figure out a way. So how do you get people to want to do this?

Speaker 2 00:43:22 You have to get them to see the vision. And the vision is the power of human connections. And that those connections happen at the nexus of interest and values. I remember I had a, a lady on my mission that we were teaching this one lady and her friend was there and her friend never, she was kind of rude to us and she was never really that wanting to participate. And when I had arrived at this area, I asked my companion, why don't we ever try to get this, this lady, her name was Ally, get ally involved. And they're like, dude, she's like, she's kind of like, she's not interested, dude. Like, you don't wanna do it. But I kind of, I noticed that she would sit there and she would kind of listen, but she wouldn't really participate. And she had her little boy who was like three years old.

Speaker 2 00:44:09 And I said something to her during one of the lessons, I kind of turned to try and include her in the lesson. And I asked her something about, I can't remember what it was about. Like what do you love? Or something like that. And she goes, I don't love anything. I hate everything. She was very like sour and just someone who was dealing with depression, all these sorts of things. But she was just bitter and like angry almost. And she said, yeah, I hate everything. And I looked at her and then I looked down at her little boy and I said, do you hate

him? And she stopped and she looked at me and she got almost like tears in her eyes. And she said, he's the only good thing I have in my life. And I was like, I know how to talk to this lady.

Speaker 2 00:44:48 Yeah. And I began to talk to her about the gospel as it related to her son, because she was passionate about her son. That was the thing at the center of her universe. I remember we went to the temple and uh, we did a, a lesson on the temple grounds at the Buenos Aires temple. We talked about families. And uh, she came with us and uh, she agreed to be baptized after that lesson. Wow. But what I realized was, is that there was something in her that she was passionate about. And in this case it was her child and it was very easy to connect her child to the gospel, obviously. But everybody has things that they're passionate about. And when we connect with their passions, when, like that kid who who never talks, who always sits in the back, there is something that if you bring up that kid will talk your ear off

Speaker 1 00:45:34 <laugh>. Yep. Yep.

Speaker 2 00:45:35 Okay. And if we can find those things, this is the vision. If you can find those things, everybody has them. You can actually get people to come alive and they will come and they will participate. They will lead the people who don't wanna do anything. They're always like, oh, you know, if people don't participate, not only will they participate, they'll lead the things, they will do the legwork, they'll do it willingly and full of love. And that's sort of the vision is if we think about interests that people have, we can create human connection and we can really touch people. And I really do believe that.

Speaker 1 00:46:09 Yeah. That's powerful. I, I'd encourage, you know, as my audience knows, I have a lot of thoughts on Elders Quorum and how it can sometimes go stale. And this is like a simple way that you could start is next Elders quorum. Just having the men stand up. Sometimes they're in the culture hall, so there's lots of space to work with, but have them stand in categories of who are the outdoors guys, the hunters. I want you in this corner, who are the gamers? Both, you know, electronic gamers and tabletop gamers who are the sports guys, right? And maybe you create subcategories there and, and then say, now just talk to each other for five minutes and plan something and, uh, let us and a report back. And I guarantee you there'll be guys of that will begin to do things like that and it'll bless their lives and it'll transform the nature, the culture of that quorum by doing so.

Speaker 1 00:46:52 So I, I can't stress this enough. I'd love for people who are listening to this or maybe this, maybe an interest to sparked there. Maybe you're gonna try some things, report back. Let's gather these stories, share ideas, see what works, what doesn't. 'cause this is really what, you know, there's so much complaining about, oh, that's not doctrine, that's culture. That the culture, the church is negative or too judgmental. You do these things, this is what transforms culture and gets us started down the right path. And where people are like, I want to gather with these people. Judgmental. What are you talking about? You know? And, uh, something can be so powerful that way. Uh, Jacob, any if pointing people to, uh, your platform and whatnot, where, where would you send them? And we'll definitely link to it as well.



Speaker 2 00:47:32 Yeah, definitely. Uh, probably the best place is just on YouTube. Just look up, uh, thoughtful faith. And I have a variety of videos with debates and conversations and all sorts of stuff, including my most recent video that I did, which, uh, talks about these interest based programs. And, uh, yeah, I'd love to, love to have people check it out.

Speaker 1 00:47:50 Awesome. Well, last question I have for you, Jacob. As you, uh, had opportunity to lead both formally and informally in, in the church, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Speaker 2 00:48:02 Oh, shoot. I think I've gained more empathy for those who have to lead. <laugh> being a leader requires you first to be a good follower, and the greatest leaders are the ones who there's that, that image of the boss whipping the people in front of him and the leader out front setting the example. I think we all know that we've seen those kind of leaders. And so as I've seen leaders like that, and as I've gotten the chance to be a leader, I just always remember those leaders that influenced me the most, and I just try and be like them because they are just trying to be like the savior, and it all ends up pointing to him. He was the greatest leader of all, and all we're trying to do is emulate what he did.

Speaker 1 00:48:53 That concludes this episode of the Leading Saints podcast. Hey, listen, would you do me a favor? You know, everybody's got that friend who listens to a ton of podcasts and maybe they aren't aware of Leading Saints. So would you mind taking the link of this episode or another episode of Leading Saints and just texting it to that friend? You know, who you, I'm talking about the friend who always listens to podcasts and is always telling you about different podcasts. Well, it's your turn to tell that friend about Leading Saints, so share it. We'd also love to hear from you. If you have any perspective or thought on this episode, you can go to [leading saints.org](http://leading saints.org) and actually leave a comment on the, uh, episode page or reach out to us at [leading saints.org/contact](http://leading saints.org/contact). Remember, go to [leading saints.org/fourteen](http://leading saints.org/fourteen) to access the remarkable presentation by Anthony Sweat about ambiguity and doctrine.

Speaker 3 00:49:50 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.