



## **Making Repentance Hopeful | An Interview With Nate Sharp**

April 13, 2024

Speaker 1 00:00:01 Attention youth leaders, if you have recently been called to lead the rising generation, I have a next step for you. Listen to an awesome presentation by Yvonne Hubert and Peter Vidmar, who are both respective members of the young Women and Young Men General Advisory Council for the church. Their presentation really helps clarify ways on how to effectively lead the youth using the Children and youth program. They also cover topics like Youth-led groups, how to lead through personal ministry, how to meet youth, where they are identifying the youth's strengths and capacities. This presentation is part of the Young Saints Virtual Library, and you can access it at no cost by going to [leading-saints.org/fourteen](https://leading-saints.org/fourteen). Again, simply click the link in the show notes or go to [leading-saints.org/one-four](https://leading-saints.org/one-four).

Speaker 1 00:00:52 I got an email the other day from an individual, I forget where he is in the world, but he says, Kurt, I love Leading Saints, and I listen to it every time I'm on the treadmill. And then one time during an interview he heard that Leading Saints has a YouTube channel and like all the interviews, at least the vast majority of them are video recorded. And you can watch the video recording of the podcast episodes. And I'm like, yeah man, get on there. Go subscribe on YouTube to Leading Saints, and you can get a visual of the interview and not just an audio experience. And even if you're not a big YouTube user, uh, do us a favor. 'cause this actually helps us gain more reach and, uh, expose our content to individuals who could really benefit from IT leaders around the world. So regardless if you are on YouTube a lot or not, go to YouTube and search for Leading Saints. Find the Familiar Red logo and just subscribe even if you don't plan to view every episode there. That's gonna help us, uh, gain a larger audience, a more reach dial in the algorithm. And, uh, we'll start showing up on Leaders feeds that they didn't know how much they're missing here at Leading Saints. So head on over

to YouTube, search for Leading Saints and subscribe to our channel and leave a comment every once in a while, but be nice.

Speaker 1 00:02:17 This is a return guest from, uh, a while ago, and that's Nate Sharp. How are you?

Speaker 2 00:02:22 I'm doing well, Kurt. How are you?

Speaker 1 00:02:24 Good. Now we were just, uh, looking up, it was at the end of 2015 that we last had the interview and the title of that was Why Every Ward, these Digital Ward Missionaries, and we talked about this word blog that your ward had created when you were Bishop, and that seems like a lifetime

Speaker 2 00:02:41 Ago, <laugh>. It does feel like a lifetime ago. That was a really fun experience doing that blog and really getting involved in digital missionary work. And it was fun to talk to you. So I'm just excited to be back with you again.

Speaker 1 00:02:54 Do you remember, I mean, I didn't listen to it before we recorded, but just the general, uh, because I guess there was this Aggieland Mormons, a blog that you created that's back when we used the term Mormon <laugh>. Exactly. And, uh, and I guess your word just created this and it created some cool missionary opportunities. And is that, is that blog still going or

Speaker 2 00:03:12 It's not still going? For one thing we renamed it to be, you know, obedient to the latest council. So, but what happened, I guess what made that experience really special is because we're in a college town and we gather people from sort of all over the place that are part of the church when they live here. We had a broadcast journalism graduate from BYU. We had a graphic designer from BU, we had someone working in public relations. These were all members of my ward, and we called them all at the same time to join the Ward Mission as digital missionaries. And we produced this blog and, and I think by the time we took down the blog, the challenge was right. Most of them moved away. In fact, now all of them that were involved, except for me, they've all moved away because many of them come here temporarily for school, or their spouse is here for school. But we had millions of page views on the blog, several million page views before it was done. And, and we hope in a small way, you know, contributed to the positive messaging around the church and, and its mission. And it was a lot of fun.

Speaker 1 00:04:18 Yeah. And that's, you know, just the nature of, of wards and leadership. You know, some leaders come and go or members come and go and not that it was a bad idea or it outgrew its worth it, just, uh, try different things. So Exactly. That's the way it goes. So, and then I guess a few years after that interview, you were then called as the stake president of the area?

Speaker 2 00:04:37 That's correct. So I was called as stake president in November of 2016, actually, so Oh, okay. It was only a year after we did that interview as a matter of fact that I was called, gosh, that seems like forever ago, but yeah, it was 2016.

Speaker 1 00:04:54 Yeah. Is there a story behind that call or was it pretty, pretty typical?

Speaker 2 00:04:58 Well, I mean, I think it was just a, a really special experience for me. I mean, I guess it was the typical experience with a, when a general Authority 70 comes to reorganize a stake presidency. I, because I was serving as a bishop at the time, I was one of, I think several dozen men who, who was interviewed by, we had a visiting General Authority 70 and an area 70 who came with him. And so it was a remarkable experience to be among the, that was interviewed. And then I went home and, and planned on doing some yard work and relaxing for the rest of the day. And, and then a phone call came later that afternoon asking me and my wife to come back to the stake center and, and visit with them and Wow. What a weekend. It was an amazing experience to say the least.

Speaker 1 00:05:47 Nice. And, uh, that was about seven years ago then?

Speaker 2 00:05:49 It was about seven years ago. Nice. So I, nice, not that we're counting, but I guess it's about a nine year, I think they say it's a nine year calling now, so we're

Speaker 1 00:05:58 That's right. Yeah. If you don't count the somebody at, uh, salt Lake will count for you <laugh>. That's

Speaker 2 00:06:03 Right. That's right.

Speaker 1 00:06:05 Yeah. Now, obviously the name of the old blog was Aggie Land, so that gives away that you're, the college town you're in is for, uh, is Texas A&M. That's

Speaker 2 00:06:13 Exactly right. So the name of the stake is the College Station Texas Stake. And obviously Texas A&M University is kind of the, the big magnet to this area. And many of the members of our stake either work at Texas a and m or their graduate students or undergraduate students. We have a, a very strong and active young single adult ward here in our stake that is filled with A&M students. And we actually, we have a community college in the area as well, blin College. And I think Kurt, I've thought before, I think one unique thing about our stake is if you took the number of young single adults or the proportion, I guess, of young single adults to the total population within our stake boundaries, I think it has to be the highest percentage of young single adults among the total population of any stake in the world, other than young single adult stakes.

Speaker 2 00:07:12 Which even there, you know, even if you're at BYU or I guess in Arizona, some of those places where they organize young single adult stakes, it's still the case that those are in very, very highly populated areas. So overall, the proportion of young single adults to the population is smaller. We've got multiple large schools. Texas A&M is the largest public university in the country. Wow. We've got over 70,000 students on campus here at In College Station at Texas A&M Plus, blin College is another 20,000 across, its two locations in our stake. We have another A&m campus called the Ellis Campus here. So we've got a very large number of young single adults within our stake boundaries.

Speaker 1 00:07:55 Wow. And so do the neighboring stakes also have YSA wards or are you the, the main one? Well,

Speaker 2 00:08:02 We're the largest one in the Houston Temple District, the Houston Texas Temple District. But there is another young single adult ward that serves, it's kind of an overlay ward that serves across multiple stakes in the Houston area. And there is a, a pretty significant population of young single adults in the greater Houston area. But I think our young single adult ward is unique just in the sense that everybody's here gonna school and there's, there's some that are working as well, but just the energy level of our young single adult ward is, is pretty amazing.

Speaker 1 00:08:34 Wow, that's awesome. Now, so with the, you know, usually why I say wards or stakes that I deal with are here locally since they are sort of their own stake. And do you, with this new emphasis on involving young single adults, has that shifted much or what's that been like in your area?

Speaker 2 00:08:49 Yeah, that, I think That historically the young single adult ward here, we've had two student wards before in the past when they were, we used to call 'em student wards, I guess back 20 years ago. Yeah. <laugh> that was in the handbook even. And often they would call members of the elders quorum to serve in the bishop, but they were not ordained high priests. It was kind of a different structure then. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> then we rebooted and became a young single adult ward. That happened probably, I'm guessing about 15 years ago. But we had three Bishop Rick members, a bishop Rick and two counselors who were married high priests from other units in our stake who would come in and serve as the Bishop Rick. And even the ward clerk often was a married member of the Stake who came in and kind of functioned in that way.

Speaker 2 00:09:38 And then when the changes were announced, I guess, I'm trying to think of the calendar. It was, I think just over a year ago that the letter came out that emphasized that we needed to utilize the young single adults themselves. And so we changed the Bishop Rick at that time. It was the right time to change the Bishop Rick. And now the Bishop of the Ward is the only married person serving in leadership anywhere in that ward. He's got two young single adult counselors. We have a young single adult ward clerk. Again, even the high counselor we called who was serving the young single adult ward as a member of the high council, was a young single adult. He recently got married, so, so he's no longer a young single adult, but for a time even the high counselor was the young single adult, uh, serving that ward. And it has really made a tremendously positive difference. Yeah, I think the young single adults love that they have so much more influence working together on the Ward Council and it's been exciting and it's been very positive for us.

Speaker 1 00:10:44 Uh, that's great. That's really great. Now you're also the, you actually work for Texas A&M and you're the dean of the business school, is that correct?

Speaker 2 00:10:51 Yeah, that's correct. So I've been in that role. I'm the dean. Our business school is called the MA Business School. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, named for

Lowry Ma, who was an entrepreneur and a businessman, uh, in here in Texas. Kind of made his career in San Antonio and a remarkable man. And so I, I started my academic career at, at Mays Business School back in 2007. Came here after I finished my graduate work, my PhD at the University of Texas, which is actually one Wow. Kind of our big rival Yeah. In Austin. So it was a, I had to throw away all of my burnt orange clothing and all of our, everything we had from UT when we came down here in thousand seven. But eventually I became the head of the accounting department here at Texas A&M about four years ago or so. And then in 2022 they launched a national search for a new dean for the business school.

Speaker 2 00:11:48 And, and I ended up being a part of that process and eventually in of 20, 22, little over a year ago, 15 months ago or so, I was announced as the new dean. And I started in that role in February of last year. So I'm only about 14, 15 months into it. But having the time of my life and I love Texas, A&M love MAs business school, love my colleagues here. The students are remarkable. It's, I'm just, I wake up every day and can't believe that I get to have this job. It's an amazing experience. <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:12:20 So do you kinda feel like, you know, you were made a stake president at your church and you're also made a stake president at your, at your job or, I mean, isn't it a very, more, more of an administrative role as, as a dean or,

Speaker 2 00:12:31 Well, I think the dean role is kind of, you get to make it what you want it to be. And it's funny you say that though. I do have, there's a number of members of the, there are a number of members of the church who are faculty members at Mays or students at May, one of them on the high council and say, gosh, I can't get away from you no matter what I try to do. I, I have to put up with you at church and then I come to work and you're my dean. And we laugh about that. But you know, I'm still teaching. I love teaching. And so even as the dean, I teach a class still at Mays Business School, I'm involved in some of our executive education that we do as well. I love being in the classroom and I get to meet a lot with prospective students and their parents.

Speaker 2 00:13:11 I do recruiting events. What I found, well, I've said enough about it, I'm sure already, but being a dean is really all about relationships, building relationships across this campus with other deans and other colleges and the provost and the president. And then it's about building relationships with former students who love the school and wanna give back and wanna help. And so that's the most rewarding and fulfilling part of the job is the relationships, including with students that you build as you try to serve people. That's kind of the purpose is to elevate the school and serve people. And, and that's one of our core values at Texas A&M is selfless service. So I, again, you can go like this or tell me to stop going about A&M. That's fine. You know, I was speaking with a, a member of the church actually who lives in works in Austin over the weekend and we were talking about Texas A&M and he said, Nate, how do more people not know about Texas A&M?

Speaker 2 00:14:09 It's just such a unique university in terms of not just the size, I mean it's the largest university in America, but the history, the values. When I came here as an applicant for a faculty job back in thousand seven, I stepped on campus for the first time I'd lived in Austin

for five years. I came down here and it was just a remarkable feeling. Like, what is this place? The way the students kind of carry themselves, they're how polite, they're, they're so respectful, they're energetic, they say hi to everybody except we say howdy on campus instead of hi, it's kind one of our traditions. So you're, but, but we're built on these core values of respect, excellence, leadership, which you would love, loyalty, integrity, and selfless service. We have an honor code much like BU does. And those traditional values of just when you give someone your word, then you do it and you're honest and you work hard and you believe in being respectful of other people.

Speaker 2 00:15:20 Those core values have just created an environment here at Texas A&M that I think you cannot find on any other university campus in the country. And it's, in fact, the contrast is what stands out. It's not just that we're, you know, modestly different from the environment on other campuses. It's a remarkable difference. And you know, I mentioned to some people, BYU has a devotional every Tuesday on campus at the basketball stadium, as you know, at the Marriott Center. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, Texas A&M has a worship service every Tuesday. It's in the evening rather than in the early afternoon like it's at. But they get thousands of students who fill the basketball arena to come to together and worship Jesus Christ. Wow. And it's public university, but it's, there's a very, well, we call it the Aggie spirit. It's gonna sound kind of strange to <laugh> to you and others that dunno what what it means because you haven't been here.

Speaker 2 00:16:17 But there's a, a special feeling on campus. And people here tend, the students and others tend to be very devoted people religiously no matter what their religion is. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and even our football games, Kurt, we, Kyle Field is our famous football stadium, which was remodeled a few years ago. It holds about 10 people when you, if you max it out, it's, most games are five or so. It's a huge stadium. Every football game starts with an invocation. Wow. And I say, where is another public university in America where they still say a prayer at the beginning of a football game, but it's right here on Texas A&M campus.

Speaker 1 00:16:54 That's

Speaker 2 00:16:55 Cool. And it's, it's really special. So

Speaker 1 00:16:57 Did, does your religion ever come up with <laugh> questions come or they hear that you're quite involved in leadership in the church or,

Speaker 2 00:17:03 Yeah, that's been really one of the joys honestly, of the last 14 or 15 months in this role. I get asked about my religious faith all the time and sometimes it comes from a, a place of worry or suspicion or you know, kind of about, well who's this latterday saint that's involved in leadership at Texas A&M now? But, but to be honest, at the same time, obviously there have been decades of great latterday saint faculty members at Texas A&M, including many who have been in various leadership positions. And I think what you find in general is that the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has a very great reputation in our area in the Bryan College Station area and beyond. There are a lot of members of the church in Texas as

you know. I mean, I think once you get outside of probably Utah, Idaho, Arizona, may and probably California.

Speaker 2 00:18:01 But you know, gosh, yeah, I guess we probably don't have as many members of the church as California. But the church, Kurt is so strong in Texas and it's growing at a very strong pace. And it's not just the transplants who are moving here. And there are a lot of those we got, I mean, Californians are coming to Texas like crazy and, and actually they're coming from all over the country to Texas. It's a great place to live and work, but it's also the missionary work that's happening here. One of my favorite things during the time that I've served as stake president, especially when we have our own stake conference without a visiting authority, but often the visiting authorities ask for a recent convert to speak. But Kurt, if you could meet the young single adults who are joining the church on, in our stake in College Station, I think you would be absolutely blown away by the, just the quality of people who meet the missionaries or they have a friend who's a member of the church. And these are kids that have come from wonderful homes. They're students at Texas A&M, they're in enrolled in these rigorous, amazing academic programs. And they meet the church at this time in their life and it resonates with them and they join and the stories they tell are incredible about how the spirit moved on them and how they, their lives are changed by finding the gospel. And it's been an incredible thing to witness all of that growth in our stake.

Speaker 1 00:19:31 Wow, that's awesome. Love to hear that. So, you know, you talk about this, this rich culture at Texas A&M and the values and, and how have you attempted to maybe stimulate a similar culture or, or a culture that's just as strong as a stake president? Uh, 'cause that's always tricky at times from that level.

Speaker 2 00:19:49 Yeah, you know, that's a great question. I think when, from the very beginning of when we were called as a stake presidency, one thing that we felt really strongly was that in fact our very first stake conference, as a matter of fact, which would've been in the spring of 20, right after we were called and set apart in the fall of 2016, my topic for that stake conference was, and even for our ward of branch conferences, actually as a matter of fact, so actually lemme back up. It was ward and branch conferences, not stake conference. Gotcha. So we started doing those in January. By the way, when we were set apart, we had 17 units in our stake. Oh wow. 17 wards and branches. We, they split our stake about six months later. And so it got a bit reduced. But anyway, the topic that spring that I spoke what, and I emphasized creating a culture of belonging.

Speaker 2 00:20:49 Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> for many, many years in particular with young single adults and institute and so forth. But throughout the church and then here more recently now I've, you know, there've been, there was a talk given in general conference pretty recently that was titled The Doctrine of Belonging. And so that was our vision too, that we wanted to create a stake that was a place where everyone who came to College Station or the surrounding areas for whatever reason, whether they were with Texas A&M University or had nothing to do with the university, whether they were lifelong Texans or a recent transplant, we wanted to say, you belong here. And it isn't just that we need you, we need you to fulfill a calling

or we need you to help us grow and create a great kind of piece of Zion here. But it was more about, we want you to be here too.

Speaker 2 00:21:42 It's not just we need you, it's, we want you here. Mm-Hmm.  
<affirmative> And that's kind of been our approach, Kurt, to serving the stake for the last seven years has been that we love everyone. We include everybody. We want people to feel when they, if they're here temporarily even, you know, there's some parts of the church I hear from time to time where if you're a student there, then it's like the people who live there almost don't even wanna try to start making a friendship because they, it's hard to say goodbye every two years or every four years if they're, or five if they're doing a PhD, whatever. And we've said from day one, we don't care if you're here for six months or one year or two years, whatever, it's, we welcome you with open arms, we want a fellowship with you. We wanna include you, we'll call you to serve in leadership callings. Even if you think you might be moving in six months, we want everyone. And that has been, I think it's created a really, a really positive environment in the stake that people have responded very well to.

Speaker 1 00:22:46 Hmm, that's awesome. I don't know if this is directly related, but it came to mind is just what is your approach with, as far as mentoring the bishops that you work with and call and, and helping them, you know, establish their own culture and in their own wards? What's that cadence like?

Speaker 2 00:23:00 Again, that, you know, for me working with the bishops is really, I think, I don't know if I could quote chapter and verse in the handbook, but, but I know I've been trained this way by area seventies and even general authorities seventies who've come through. I think the stake president's perhaps single most important responsibility is to be a great steward of the bishops of the stake. You know, while they're watching over the youth and children in their stakes, or excuse me, in their wards. And of course I care about all the members from the children all the way up, but the relationship I have with the bishops is really important. And to support them and be there for them, be accessible to them, visit with them frequently, I meet with them, often counsel together with them about the, not just the challenges they may be experiencing in their own wards and branches.

Speaker 2 00:23:55 In our case, we have some of both in our stake, but also just their personal lives. How are things in their personal lives? And bishops are not without challenges. We had a bishop who was unemployed at the beginning part of this year. He was actually employed by Texas A&M, but he was involved in the football program and we had some turnover in the coaching and, and staff of the football program recently. If you have paid attention to the news, that's a whole nother story for another podcast, <laugh>. Alright. But his job turned over and suddenly he was looking for work in our area. And so supporting them, the bishops of the stake and being there for them is important. And if I may, I'll just, you know, one thing we've, that I've really focused on with our bishops relates to sort of how they interact with and mentor and shepherd the youth of our stake.

Speaker 2 00:24:50 I think it's the, undoubtedly the most important responsibility the bishops have. And it's also the most important trust that is placed in them by parents, by the church itself



to trust our bishops and their counselors to be good mentors, great leaders, great counselors to the youth and to help them in some cases through difficult things that they go through when they wanna repent, for example, of, of things that have happened in their lives. And that's been a, a real strong emphasis in our, in my mentoring with the stake presidents, that a bishop has an opportunity to demonstrate to the youth in his ward, for example, what I call hopeful repentance looks like. And the great thing Kurt too, is I don't, I can't think of another church leader in my lifetime who has taught about repentance more powerfully, more regularly, more hopefully than President Nelson.

Speaker 2 00:25:52 Mm-Hmm. And I feel so lucky and just blessed that my time as stake president overlaps almost very, very closely with when he has been president of the church and has taught so clearly about repentance that for example, when a youth comes to a bishop with a heavy burden that they want help with, it's the responsibility of the bishop to help that youth or young, single adults or frankly, obviously it extends to all members, but in particular to the youth to help them feel hopeful and optimistic. And if repentance is joy the way we've heard President Nelson and others talk about it and the scriptures certainly that, and the way the savior personally ministered to people who needed to repent his ministry, then we, I feel like it makes one of the biggest impressions on them that they'll look back on later in their life when they think about their experience as a youth in the church.

Speaker 2 00:26:52 If they have a bishop who shepherds them through the repentance process in a hopeful, joyful, optimistic way, gives them hope for the future, helps them understand the role that the savior plays in all of that. And removes the shame. I think back to, I think in earlier generations in including in my youth, although I had wonderful bishops who approached things I think very sensitively and well and appropriately. But I think, you know, in former times shame was a lot more a part of kind of how youth felt when they came forward seeking help on the repentance process. They were sometimes made to feel like what they had done was, was awful and terrible. And, and even, and then they ended up feeling like, well I guess that means I'm a bad person, you know, if I've done something bad. And, and we have, the church has really, I believe, taught so clearly and so well in recent years, largely thanks to the way the spirit has moved on, president Nelson, that's allowed us to teach repentance in a very hopeful way. That is amazing to watch.

Speaker 1 00:28:01 Yeah. I love that framing of, of repentance, of not just repentance, but a hopeful repentance. 'cause that's, I mean, it should be synonymous right? Or that should be redundant, but yes, it's not. And so That's right. That's great. Are there like specific like applications that you maybe would articulate with a new bishop that you're serving with to help them know how to do that? 'cause sometimes it's like, that makes sense in the brain, but <laugh> the application or when I'm sitting in front of a youth or even an adult who's striving to repent, how do I make that more hopeful?

Speaker 2 00:28:32 Yeah, I mean, I think it's a great question. There's a few things that come to mind for me. So I think one of the litmus tests that I talk with bishops about, you know, in terms how well they're accomplishing that with someone who comes to them seeking help with repentance, one litmus test is after your visit is over with them, let's say that you're in the

office visiting for an hour, half hour, hour, whatever the time is, when that person gets up and leaves your office, do they feel significantly more hopeful than they felt when they walked in? Have their burdens been made lighter? Now it's, it's, and I, believe me, it isn't that the repentance process can completely finish in one visit. We all know that's not the way it works. So it's not to say that the burden is gone, but the burden can be made lighter.

Speaker 2 00:29:27 And it's, it's even simple things like this. You know, a youth comes in, most of the youth who come in to repent to a bishop, frankly are terrified of it in many cases, even if they're close to their bishop. And sometimes being close to the bishop makes it more scary because they're afraid they're telling something to a priesthood leader. And it might be the first time they've shared that with any adult. You know, we encourage them to be open with their parents in every setting where we get the chance. We encourage youth to share what's going on in their lives with their parents. And notwithstanding that in many cases when they come to talk with the bishop, it could be the first time that they're sharing what happened with someone else. And I've framed it with the bishops that, you know, the youth are watching every bit of nonverbal communication when they're talking with you.

Speaker 2 00:30:21 They're looking for facial expressions, body language that's helping them process how they're being received, how their confession is being received. And often, Kurt, when I was in that role as a bishop and even as a stake president, when I deal with matters related to repentance, I'll almost initially, the first words outta my mouth are, you know what, I'm so proud of you for having the courage to come in here today and talk about this. I know it's not easy. I'm sure you stood outside that office door feeling a lot of trepidation and just worry about how it would go. And I want for a moment to just tell you, take a deep breath, it's all gonna be okay. The hardest part is over coming forward like you've done. I'm so proud of you and now I, I'm gonna be with you and I'm gonna walk every step of the re the path of repentance with you that I can walk with you.

Speaker 2 00:31:22 Some of it you're gonna have to do alone. And even that I'm gonna shepherd you. I'm here for you. And when a youth hears, I'm proud of you for coming today and starting this process, in many cases, the surprise on their face, it's like, it's the last thing they expected to hear. And it's not to be clear, I'm not telling the bishops to say we're proud of them for what happened. Obviously that's, you know, we're working with them to change and repair what happened in, in some cases. But we're proud of them for taking that step. And I have taught the bishops to use that kind of language and to express love and admiration for the youth who come forward like that. And, you know, and then one last thing that comes to mind. I think traditionally in the church, priesthood leaders assign, you know, members who come in to work on repentance, they assign them things to read.

Speaker 2 00:32:20 It could be a book, it could be conference talks, it could be chapters of scripture in the standard works. And even that are very thoughtful and intentional and careful about what we assign. And there are general conference messages, for example, that are so, so uplifting and strengthening and they give hope, you know, on the topic of repentance. And there are verses of scripture and chapters of scripture that can be shared that do that. And then there are other materials that could be assigned. You know, many of them written, I think

decades ago in some cases that are a little bit more, I'll use the term heavy handed almost in the way they talk about the repentance process. And my feeling is the key holder for my stake has been that that's not the approach I wanna take. And that's not the approach I think that really fits with the generation of youth and children and young single adults that we're nurturing in the gospel right now. And so we focus on sharing hope-filled messages with them. And that's another thing I've asked the bishops to, to be c

Speaker 1 00:33:33 Yeah. And I think that's, uh, because it's one of those things that maybe a stake president can assume is happening, but to be really direct about maybe some better resources if you are going to ask them, you know, to read or ponder over something, some better resources that way. And you know, one I'll just highlight here, the, and you know, if you want more church or apostle sanctioned books and the closer they are to modern day, the better. Like I'm just thinking of the divine gift of forgiveness by Elder Anderson. Phenomenal resource that I think of every bishop should read it within his first two months Right. Of serving. Yes. And, and use that, that concepts in there are so refreshing and hope failed, you know?

Speaker 2 00:34:13 Yes. Yeah. I love what you said about the closer we're to the current living, you know, the apostles and prophets who are serving right now today. I feel like the resources that they make available, their conference talks, the books that they've written such as Elder Anderson's book that you mentioned. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. I just feel like those are tremendous resources and they, they match the tone and the messaging that we're hearing in general conference now. Yeah. And so it's consistent with, with what the youth are hearing when they go to, when they watch general conference. And it just, I think it works really, really well that way. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:34:51 Uh, tell me about, uh, sacrament meetings in your stake. And as far as, you know, there's, I think I, I know specifically in the Utah area, I'm sure in other areas there's been this emphasis on having a Christ centered sacrament meeting and sometimes we can, we can miss the Mark A. Little bit with the best intentions. But I mean, how do you go about coaching your bishops on facilitating a Christ-centered sacrament meeting?

Speaker 2 00:35:14 That's something that we have worked really hard on during the time that we've been serving. And it's something I feel like is just so critical to not just the experience that our members have when they come to sacrament meeting, but it's the individuals who are studying with the missionaries who come, some of them come into a sacrament meeting for their first time ever. And again, they're listening and looking, looking for, you know, what is this church and what do they believe? And you know, and by the way, the general conference leadership training resources that came out last October that are available through the gospel library and we've been using those really heavily with our stake council, our ward conferences, our bishops council that we hold and

Speaker 1 00:36:00 So forth. And, and just to clarify, these are resources in the gospel library if you are a leader, right. They're not gonna be in my gospel library. I'm pretty sure

Speaker 2 00:36:09 <laugh> I you may be right about that. Although when we go to ward conferences, we had one yesterday. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> then during the second hour we're actually having members pull out their devices and kind of follow along. And so I think there was a time when some of those resources were restricted based on your calling and, and I, maybe there's some of that still, but I'm guessing, I dunno if you have your gospel library there now, but uh, yeah, yeah. If you, so if you click on handbooks, okay. I think it's handbooks and callings and then you look at um,

Speaker 1 00:36:44 Leadership instruction.

Speaker 2 00:36:45 Leadership instruction. That's exactly right. And then you go to general conference. So general conference leadership meeting, do you see that there

Speaker 1 00:36:54 Uhhuh and then,

Speaker 2 00:36:55 And then October, 2023 leadership instruction.

Speaker 1 00:36:59 Yeah. So when I go to that, I just see leadership instruction summaries. Do you see more than that?

Speaker 2 00:37:04 I see that. So I have that as well. And then I have one more that might a bit different that says stake and ward council materials and those are the video clips.

Speaker 1 00:37:15 Oh, okay. So yeah, that I do not have.

Speaker 2 00:37:17 Okay. So that may be the difference. So the video clips are I think virtually one-to-one with these summaries. So the summaries are like A PDF that you have access to. And then we have videos that we can use in training opportunities as well. And so the reason I brought that up is in the October general conference leadership training, they talked a lot about making sacrament meetings more Christ-centered. That was a major theme. And then also making them more welcoming and more inviting. That was where they began talking about, for example, having greeters greeters for your ward that are actually positioned at the outside doors so that when a member walks up from the parking lot or a visitor, then before they get to the first set of outside doors, you've got, and we're using the young women in our stake to do the greeting, which was encouraged by the leadership training because I mean, who's got more sunshine and just smiles and what better group to welcome people to church than the young women of the church? And so anyway, I wanted to acknowledge that there was tremendously helpful training from the general conference materials. But for the last seven years, we have said to people and to the bishops in our stake that we want every sacrament meeting talk, no matter what doctrine of the gospel it might be about, they all need to be connected explicitly to Jesus Christ. So lemme give you an example of what we mean by that. Take for ex, for example, I'll just pick two topics. Family history and the law of tithing,

Speaker 2 00:39:02 They're both important doctrines. We teach them as missionaries to people who are in, you know, finding out about the church for the first time. It's not that they are inappropriate topics for a sacrament meeting, but the position we've taken is they're

inappropriate for sacrament meeting if we don't connect them very directly to the savior himself. So it cannot be someone's assigned to speak on the lo tithing, we just leave it at that. It's gotta be more along the lines of what we learn about Jesus Christ and his sacrifice through our obedience to the law of tithing. Or perhaps something like, how does obedience to the law of tithing draw us closer to Jesus Christ or for family history? It could be what does participation in family history work teach us about the great vicarious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ through his atonement. You know, we're making, we're very careful to connect every sacrament meeting topic to the savior himself.

Speaker 2 00:40:09 And that's because we view sacrament meeting same way it's talked about in general conference last October as a meeting that commemorates and recognizes and remembers the savior and his sacrifice. We go there to make covenants at the sacrament table in commemoration of his atoning sacrifice. And everything that happens in that meeting should be focused on him. You know, there was a great talk, there was a talk given and okay, his name's Thomas Griffith, he gave a devotional talk at BYU back in 2006. So we're approaching 20 years ago and it was titled The Very Root of Christian Doctrine.

Speaker 1 00:40:53 Well, and I, and I'll insert here that I interviewed him about six months ago about that talk so people can, you're kidding. Oh

Speaker 2 00:41:00 No.

Speaker 1 00:41:00 Okay. No, he got the detail about the whole, the whole approach of doing that in a stake. And so people should listen to the talk and then also we'll link to that, that episode as well.

Speaker 2 00:41:10 Okay. That's amazing. Well, I came across that talk when I was a bishop, actually I had read it before then, but we used that when I was a bishop and we've used it now in our stake. We've tried to take the same approach that President Griffith took when he was a stake president, which is to say that sacrament meeting should be Christ-centered period. You know, know there should be no doubt in the mind of any visitor who walks into one of our meetings that Jesus Christ is whom we worship. That that meeting is devoted to him, that we're bearing witness of him or testifying of him and his atoning sacrifice. And there's a power in it. And you know, elder Holland said once, or President said once in one of his talks, I forget which one off the head said, if we continue hand when people ask for bread, they will eventually stop to the bakery <laugh>.

Speaker 2 00:42:11 And true to me, it was such a profound analogy that people come to sacrament meeting wanting to feel connected to Jesus Christ. They wanna make covenants with him through the ordinance of the sacrament and they wanna hear about him. It's back to second Nephi. We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ. And that should characterize every sacrament meeting in the church. And to the extent that we've done that, and we've tried to do that here, we consistently hear from members who come here for a period and and then move on or hear for a long time. They say, man, these, the

sacrament meetings in this stake are just powerful because they hear about the Savior and hear testimonies of him.

Speaker 1 00:42:57 Yeah. Often as I think about that, and I love the analogy of President Holland offers of, of the individuals wanna be fed, they don't want to be weighed down. Right. And so often with the best intentions, and it seems like in my experience, I hear it more at stake conference than anywhere else of just this feeling of this message of we've got to do better. Right. And you've gotta do better. I've gotta do be, and we don't realize that Christ did enough. Like that message is redemptive and that feeds me. Yes. That le helps me leave the building feeling redeemed, not thinking, not weighed down or thinking I'm not measuring up. What am I, you know, kind of beat myself up as I walk out into the park.

Speaker 2 00:43:36 That's right. And you know, if I may in my mind one of the most powerful demonstrations of what you just shared about just feeling your burdens lifted, feeling redeemed, having a redemptive message, you know, I, this insight came to me a few years ago. I was substitute teaching in seminary when we were doing doctrine covenants. And I just wanna mention briefly about section 45 of doctrine covenants. I believe it's one of the most powerful messages about the savior in all the standard works. And I guess what struck me when I was preparing for this seminary lesson at that time is like four 30 in the morning trying to get ready for a early morning seminary lesson. And I'm juggling my president calling and substituting in seminary.

Speaker 2 00:44:24 But this is the, Jesus actually steps into a role play for us. He demonstrates a role play as a teaching technique. And it's funny, when I was a missionary in South Korea, you know, more than 25 years ago, we did role plays all the time. We'd go to zone conference and the mission president would, you know, pick randomly pick on a couple of us outta the audience and say, hey, they're gonna, these elders are gonna come up and they're gonna role play teaching, you know, discussion four or whatever. And you would get into character and you do a role play. And role plays are used a lot in the church because they're effective and they work. And Jesus actually does a role play here in section 45 verses three through five. I'm gonna read that if that's okay with you. Please. And before I do that, lemme just say these verses are well known in the sense that Jesus is gonna describe his role as our advocates and of all the titles of the Savior.

Speaker 2 00:45:28 And he has so many of them and they're all so meaningful. His title as our advocate with the Father is such a powerful title and it's such a, an encouraging and hopeful title to know that he advocates for us. And when I have thought, you know, kind of in my normal life, Kurt, about what it means to be an advocate, it's interesting because the example I've given, I've got a son who is 12 years old and he really wants to play football in middle school next year. Oh wow. We've never allowed our boys to play football even though football's like a religion in Texas.

Speaker 1 00:46:08 <laugh>. Yeah, don't mention that around the office, you know,

Speaker 2 00:46:10 <laugh>, I know, I think I'd be run outta my office and probably run outta a stake if I admitted that we don't let our boys play football. But suddenly, you know, he's the youngest in the family and he wants it so badly and he's been begging us to let him play football. But I was thinking, you know, the problem, one challenge he would have is if he tried out for the middle school football team, because we have not let him play football so far in his life, he's gonna struggle to make the team anyway even if we did change our minds. And I've thought, you know, I guess what if I went to the coach and advocated for my son, if I became his advocate, I could go to him and say, listen coach, I know that my son Austin has not played football for several years, like the rest of these kids trying out and he's kind of new to the sport, but gosh, lemme tell you about him.

Speaker 2 00:46:59 He's got so much grit, he's got a lot of athleticism. I've thrown some footballs to him in the backyard and I've watched him make some great catches and he's got a positive attitude. And I could list all these things about my son in my attempt to be his advocate and try to help him get on the football team. And that's the way I kind of think about what it means to be an advocate. And then you read this role play that the savior gives us in section 45 and he completely turns my impression it means to be an advocate on its head because it's totally different. And here's what he says starting in three. He says, listen to him, who is the advocate with the father who is pleading your cause before him. And now he steps into role play moment four saying, father behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin in whom thou was well pleased, behold the blood of thy son, which was shed the blood of him whom thou gave ust that thy self might be glorified.

Speaker 2 00:48:06 Wherefore father spare these, my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life. So Kurt, he doesn't go before the father and advocate for us on the basis of all the things I've done to deserve eternal life. He advocates for us in front of the Father on the basis of what he did for us. It was his sufferings and death, it was his blood that was shed. And because of that, he can be our advocate. And when I figured that out, that he's never gonna stand before the Father and say, look at what Nate Sharp did during his life. It's not gonna be that. And because I know that his, and he even says he's pleading your cause. Well guess what? Our cause is the cause of Jesus Christ and the fact that he paid for our sins and he's already answered the ends of the law on our behalf. That's our greatest case that he can plead before the Father. And it changes everything Kurt, about what we believe about our relationship with Jesus Christ, what it means for him to be our advocate and what our relationship with the Father is like. And it's, I just think it's so powerful and so disruptive.

Speaker 1 00:49:29 What an insight. I really appreciate you sharing that. That's so, so true because, and like you said, if we get that next step, like maybe someday Christ will prove to the Father why we deserve to get in, but he, he's already proven it through who he is and uh, that's exactly, that's

Speaker 2 00:49:44 Awesome.

Speaker 1 00:49:44 That's awesome. And, and now you can go to your son's football coach and describe Patrick Mahomes and why he <laugh>. That's right. Same idea. A little different. Really good. Well, as we, before we wrap up here, I wanted to make sure we hit on this concept of eliminating the transactional view of our relationship with, with Jesus Christ. And I think you've touched on some of these things, but I mean, what, what more can you teach us about just 'cause it's easy for us humans and mortals to get in this transactional relationship with all things in life it seems.

Speaker 2 00:50:15 Yeah, it's so true. And it's funny how, like you said, just how naturally and how easily we let our understanding of of God and of our relationship with him and of the Savior and that relationship kind of just devolve into a transactional relationship. I've loved the analogy that's been shared recently by one of the apostles, I think it was Elder Christofferson, but hopefully you can edit that if I got the wrong apostle who talked about the, the heavenly vending machine, you know?

Speaker 1 00:50:46 Oh yeah, yeah. I think it was him Uhhuh,

Speaker 2 00:50:47 I believe it was Elder Christofferson that, you know, it's, it's not as if God is, you know, up in heaven just waiting for us to put a quarter in the machine and for every quarter we put in then a blessing pops out. You know, that's a very transactional view, but it's amazing to me how many of our members, and maybe it starts in youth and, and I dunno where it all originates, but they have sort of that transactional view. Part of it I think may relate to that, those wonderful verses in section one 30 of the doctrine covenants, which I'll quote. And I'm so grateful that I was there at Brigham Young University when Elder Maxwell gave a fireside when I was a student there. And the title of the fireside was just Insights from my Life. It was, you know, getting a little bit toward the latter part of Elder Maxwell's life, of course.

Speaker 2 00:51:42 But in that fireside, he shared these verses. So I have kind of two scriptures I wanna use, if I may, to illustrate how we can overcome this transactional view. The first one then coming back to one 30, this is section one 30 versus 20 and 21, and it says, there is a law irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world upon which all blessings are predicated. And when we obtain any blessing from God, it's by obedience to that law upon which it's predicated. And you know, if you take those two verses kind of that at a sort of superficial interpretation, then in a sense, I guess you could misinterpret them as describing a transactional relationship with the blessings of heaven. And in his devotional speech at BYU, elder Maxwell said, you know, if you've kind of puzzled over those verses the way I have in my life, the only answer I can give you is that it must be the case that the ratio of the Lord's blessings to our relatively minuscule obedience is a very, very generous ratio indeed.

Speaker 2 00:52:55 Meaning that yes, of course that that scripture is true, it's doctrine that the blessings of heaven are predicated upon our obedience, but that does not mean it's a one-to-one relationship. And we offer, you know, in that talk, he said, the Lord is so anxious to bless us, so eager to be merciful and and to bless us. And so that idea of a generous ratio of blessings to our obedience, I think is so critical. Another thing I'll mention, one last scripture that I think is, is also really important because sometimes Kurt, I think we end up feeling like we



have almost a transactional relationship, even with the holy scriptures. And so for example, this year we're studying the Book of Mormon. And everyone I know in the, in our stake at least is so excited about that. I mean, who doesn't love the Book of Mormon among standard?

Speaker 2 00:53:51 It's just such a joy to study and it's so powerful and, and everyone loves stories and the testimonies are there. And I think the risk is that if we're not careful, we forget what the scriptures were given to us for in the first place. Like why the Lord gave them to us. And the reality is there's sort of a means to an end like the Book of Mormons, not the end, the Book of Mormon is a means to an end. It's meant to help draw us to Jesus Christ and to help us increase our faith in and come un and all those things. And there are these beautiful verses in the New Testament in John five, where the Lord Jesus Christ actually rebukes some of his followers. And what's amazing to me, Kurt, is these verses, one of them in particular is often misquoted and misused in our church, in part because the King James version of the Bible actually mistranslated one of the verses in, in a pretty important way.

Speaker 2 00:54:56 It's missing one word, but that one word changes the whole meaning of the verse. And so this is John chapter five verses 38 through 40, just three verses. But again, it, it gets to the heart of what are the scriptures for and how do we remember their ultimate purpose when we're interacting with them so that we can get away from this idea of almost this transactional, oh, I checked a box today, I read my 25 minutes in the Book of Mormon. I'm done, I can move on. And I love the rebuke the savior gives. So I'll quote verse 38 first and then I'll say a quick thing about 39. It says in 38, and ye have not his word abiding in you for whom he has sent him. Ye believe not. Then verse 39 starts with search the scriptures and it sounds like a commandment.

Speaker 2 00:55:54 And that's the way the church uses this verse in about every general conference talk I've ever read that quotes John 5 39, they quote it as saying, search the scriptures. When in reality Jesus is actually making the opposite point and what it's supposed to say. If you read other translations, the word ye is supposed to be at the beginning or you, and so lemme read it that way. And then you, you'll see how these verses blend together. It should say you search the scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life and they're, they, which testify of me and ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. And so when you add all that together, those three verses, what he's saying to his followers is, you spend all your time searching the scriptures because you think you can get eternal life from a book.

Speaker 2 00:56:50 And yet you don't even recognize that I'm the person, those very scriptures have been pointing you toward from the beginning of the Old Testament, up until New Testament times, those words, those prophets who wrote were testifying of Jesus and his own followers missed that in the scriptures. And that's why he said, you don't have my word in you, because you won't accept me as the one the Scriptures testify. So my point is, it's not about the book. It was never about the book. It's not about the Bible. It's not about the doctrine covenants. It's not about the book. And it's not about checking a box and having a transactional relationship with the scriptures. Either those scriptures, and this year in particular, the Book of Mormon, they were given to us as an instrument to bring our souls to Jesus Christ. There's a power in the written word to lead us to Jesus Christ.

Speaker 2 00:57:57 And if we stop at the book and we don't fill our souls and our lives with his word, and let those books change us, change who we're change, how we treat other people, help us develop Christlike attributes, all those wonderful things the scriptures can do, that's not transactional, that's transformational. That's the scriptures leading you to the Savior, because he's the one that it's all about. And so those are a few of the things that, that, you know, we've taught and emphasized in terms of eliminating a transactional view of our relationship with God or with the scriptures and focusing on developing a love for the Savior and for Heavenly Father, and, uh, letting that be the guiding force in our lives.

Speaker 1 00:58:49 Love it. Now, uh, I wanna, I something now I'm just freestyling here, but I think I Yeah. Like an insight that came to mind as you were taking us on that journey, which I think emphasizes your point. Going back to Dr. Cums, well, for you to put this up against Dr. Cums 45 and then taking us to Dr. Cums one 30, so in verse 21. And when you obtain any blessing, so, and when we obtain any blessing from God Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, it is by obedience. It never says it is by our obedience. Mm. But Jesus fulfilled, he was obedient to the law upon which it was predicated. It is through our relationship with him, just like it talked about in 45. It's his works that did it. Right? Yes. It's his obedience. Because o oftentimes I've received incredible blessings, and I have to think, what did I do? Like what law in heaven that this was predicated? And oftentimes I can't can think of one, right. Or yes, I get a blessing and I'm like, I, I think there was a, a paper filing error somewhere. 'cause I don't think I was supposed to get this blessing right. But it is, it never says our obedience, it just obedience to the law which Jesus Christ fulfilled. So, I don't know, something to think about.

Speaker 2 01:00:00 I think it's an amazing insight. Yeah. I love that insight. And it's consistent with Elder Maxwell again, saying, if you've puzzled about why you were blessed, when you don't feel like you deserve it, you know, I, I think you're, I think that's a wonderful, powerful insight. Thank you.

Speaker 1 01:00:14 Awesome. Well, Nate, this has been such a fantastic discussion and, uh, maybe let's do it again before 2032. Huh? What'd he say? <laugh>

Speaker 2 01:00:22 <laugh>. Exactly, exactly. I would love it. It's been an honor. Thank you for, for having me on. I appreciate it, Kurt, very much. Yeah. And well, thanks for all you're doing with the podcast. Sure.

Speaker 1 01:00:31 No, I, it's a lot of fun. I appreciate it. Last question, I don't even know if I asked you this, you know, eight years ago or whatever, but as you reflect on your time as a leader, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Speaker 2 01:00:42 You know, I think one of the most sacred things about the experiences that you have as a leader in the church is just getting that, I hope it doesn't sound like a cliché, but that front row seat to observe the way a relationship with Jesus Christ and just the power of Jesus Christ to change people's lives. And I'll remember for the rest of my life experiences I've had as a stake president, where I've watched the Savior's power to heal people and to forgive people and to bring, you know, so many of his miracles in the scriptures were bringing, he even

brought people who had died back to life. And in my ministry and leadership in the church, I have seen him bring back to life people's testimonies, for example, where I thought that the light has gone out, like the flame is out, the candle's not even there anymore. It's gone. The belief and the faith are gone. And yet the Savior has the power to bring it back to life. And so to be able to watch him bless people and heal people and change people's lives has been the most humbling thing to see. And one of the greatest blessings that has taught me about the importance of following Jesus in my own life and trusting him for all of the healing and blessings and everything that I need in my life. It's been amazing to watch.

Speaker 1 01:02:16 That concludes this episode of the Leading Saints podcast. We'd love to hear from you about your questions or thoughts or comments. You can either leave a comment on the, uh, post related to this episode@leadingsaints.org or go to [leading-saints.org/contact](http://leading-saints.org/contact) and send us your perspective or questions. If there's other episodes or topics you'd like to hear on the Leading Saints Podcast, go to [leading-saints.org/contact](http://leading-saints.org/contact) and share with us the information there. And we would love for you to share this with any individual you think this would apply to, especially maybe individuals in your ward council or other leaders that you may know who would really appreciate the perspectives that we discussed. Remember, check the show notes to listen to the powerful presentation by the general young men, young Women Advisory Council members, or go to [leading-saints.org/fourteen](http://leading-saints.org/fourteen).

Speaker 3 01:03:10 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.