



## **The Silent Burdens of Men in Elders Quorum | An Interview with Joe Speredon**

March 30, 2024

Speaker 1 00:00:02 How do you help someone tell their spouse that they have secretly been viewing pornography? Wow. These are tough situations. Thankfully, one of my favorite and most effective therapists, Jeff Reer, put together a presentation about disclosing betrayal. Jeff explains how disclosing betrayal can make recovery and repentance so much more difficult if it isn't handled correctly. This isn't a rip the bandaid off quickly type of situation. With a better understanding of betrayal, church leaders can be a strong resource in helping couples navigate the awful effects of pornography usage. You can watch Jeff's entire presentation at no cost in the Liberating Saints virtual library. Simply go to [leading-saints.org/fourteen](https://leading-saints.org/fourteen), and you can sign up for 14 days of free access to Jeff's presentation and the entire library. It's one of my favorite interviews.

Speaker 1 00:00:56 Hey, if you're newbie to Leading Saints, it's important that you know, what is this Leading Saints thing? Well, leading Saints is a nonprofit organization dedicated, helping latter day saints be better prepared to lead. And the way we do that is through content creation. So we have this phenomenal podcast. We have a newsletter, we have virtual conferences. So much more at articles on our website. I mean, I could go on and on, right? <laugh>, and we encourage you to, uh, jump in, check out Leading Saints, uh, go to the search bar@[leadingsaints.org](https://leadingsaints.org) and type in some topics and see what pops up. We're just glad you're here to join us.

Speaker 1 00:01:36 Hey everyone. Welcome back to the Leading Saints podcast. I'm excited to introduce you to an old friend of mine named Joe Spirit, and we just happened to go to high school together. Uh, he was a year older than me, just an awesome guy. Uh, and we

were reconnected a few decades after high school. And, uh, to see the work he's doing with men and masculinity and helping gather men specifically in Utah is inspiring. And so we explore more of this concept, and we've been talking more and more on leading saints about men at church, men in elders quorum What do we need to understand? And, and I hope you feel a little bit overwhelmed by the amount of content we've been producing in relation to men in at church, because this is a big problem. We often don't know how to approach these things, so I'd rather overwhelm you with information rather than not give you enough.

Speaker 1 00:02:23 And so Joe brings a really unique perspective on what is toxic masculinity? Where does it come from? Why do men feel like they have to carry the blame for a lot of things? Why do a lot of men, even young men, just seem to struggle in life. They just can't seem to get a hold of the next step in life and show up with strength and purpose. And so phenomenal discussion, especially, uh, this would be one to share with the elders quorum you know, in your life. How can we stimulate a sense of brotherhood in elders? And Joe discusses it all. It's phenomenal. So here's my interview with Joe today. I'm welcome in an old friend, Joe Spiritan. How are you? I'm good. Good to be here. Now we, we happened to go to high school together. I think you were age older. You were class of 99, class of nine. Nine. I was 2000. And, uh, you were the, the big scary guy that walked the roam the halls. Right. Uh, but then we connected just a few years ago again, and then we're, we have such a passion for men's work and, uh, helping, helping men that, that led to this interview. So

Speaker 2 00:03:31 It's awesome.

Speaker 1 00:03:32 Nice. It's

Speaker 2 00:03:32 Cool to see if things go full circle.

Speaker 1 00:03:33 That's right. So how do you put yourself into perspective? Who's Joe Spearin?

Speaker 2 00:03:38 Joe Spearin grew up in West Valley. Yeah. Obviously same. And,

Speaker 1 00:03:42 And we weren't, we were never part of a gang. I mean, we

Speaker 2 00:03:44 Never part of any gangs.

Speaker 1 00:03:46 <laugh> probably, I guess I used to speak by myself,

Speaker 2 00:03:48 Missed out on that opportunity. <laugh>. Yeah. Granger High School, served a mission to Brazil. Cool. Uh, port Brazil, came home, got married to another Granger alumni. That's right. And have four children now. I have three sons and a daughter who are all teenagers. So that obviously occupies a lot of my time and focus outside of men's work and other things that I do. And they've been pretty solely dedicated to men's work for the past five years or so. Really feeling called to that space first for myself and then being able to share that with others

Speaker 1 00:04:21 As well. Yeah. And where did that start? Where did that come from, you think?

Speaker 2 00:04:24 Man, like so many people, you know, going into 2020, I found myself in that kind of cliché, existential crisis, midlife crisis thing, and found myself in the middle of a lot of panic, a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety. And covid just fast forward, expedited all of that greatly. And, uh, it got pretty dark. It got pretty hard and got to a point to where I felt like I had done all the things that I was supposed to do. And it still didn't feel like I had a lot of alleviation from any of those negative feelings. So, as kind of a Hail Mary, I went to an event in October of 2020 with an organization called Sacred Sons. And the guys in the marketing pitches do not look like me at all. <laugh>. It didn't feel like it was my people, quote unquote, but it changed my life. And there was this massive catalyst for awareness, for accountability. And from that place, it, it kind of was the springboard into the work for me.

Speaker 1 00:05:24 Yeah. Yeah. And, and these type of experience can, you know, they can awaken the heart of a man in unique ways. And, and, and that's what I, because if we had more Joe spirits in, in all of our quorums, it's like, wow, we're gonna do something cool here. Like, there's a healthy energy coming from you. Really. There's like, again, that because men are really good at like, suffering in silence, secluding, like, especially through 2020 things like, oh yeah, okay, I, I don't wanna show weakness. Right. Like these natural things. And so by helping men really connect and and awakening to that, there can be a lot of strength that's offered.

Speaker 2 00:05:58 Well, yeah, that was really one of my first introductions. As I went to this retreat, they lined us up across from each other. And obviously in the midst of everything with masks, they had us put on these bandanas as masks. And they lined us up and they said, all right, this man across from you, remove your mask and tell him what you're struggling with. Tell him who you are and who you really are. And the guy across from me went first. And the dang guy took my answers, <laugh>, he said the exact same things that I was going through, the same things that I was feeling. And then I got to go and share with him. And then they moved everybody down one down the down, and the next guy said the same things. And I realized, yes, we are expert at suffering in silence, and we're expert at convincing ourselves that we're the only ones feeling certain things. And the reality is, is that's couldn't be further from the truth.

Speaker 1 00:06:47 Yeah. Was it hard for you to go into a situation like that? 'cause you know, men have an aversion to therapy Right. Or to go to a place and talk about their feelings, especially with other men. So like, what got you to that place where you felt comfortable doing that?

Speaker 2 00:07:01 You know, one of my biggest focuses over the past couple of years has been shifting the culture of you have to be broken or like this close to breaking before you ask for help. Hmm. And it, it's very much in line with our healthcare system where everything is pretty reactive and it's about a cure rather than prevention

Speaker 1 00:07:20 Addressing the symptoms.

Speaker 2 00:07:21 Yeah, exactly. And so I had done a lot of that, and I, I got to that place where I was just so desperate that my pride didn't matter anymore. I was so desperate that the mask that I had been maintaining couldn't be maintained anymore. And I believe it's important for us to start shifting that very much like our physical health rather than waiting until the heart attack just saying like, oh, hey, I, I might have a little bit here that I need to do something about and do it now. It's so much easier when we address those things in the beginning stages rather than waiting tele a crisis. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:07:53 And, and we, I would hope that like the idea of elder's quorum is like beautiful. Like on paper it's like, that is cool. Yeah. Like you guys have a men's group, you get together and you, you know, it used to be every week, but I was like every other week, like, wow. But sometimes we like have the engine, but we just don't know how to turn it on. Right. Or create that place where men who need help can speak up, and oftentimes they don't speak up at others quorum. They'll like, you know, schedule a point with the bishop maybe, or let's do this behind doors. Right. And so that's, it's hopefully something we can figure out to stimulate more. Like, is there hope there? I mean, how, tell me about just like elders quorum and approach. Like what should men be looking for or what can we consider about Elders

Speaker 2 00:08:32 Quorum? You know, elders Quorum obviously is this very interesting thing in and of itself to study. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And the cliché idea there is that the guy shows up, he hasn't prepared for his lesson, he reads it, you know, word for word from the book. However many men are there all on their phone, you know, watching a game or just completely disconnected. The elders quorum president is desperately trying, and like, he's gonna be the one that comments and says things. And every one of those men is suffering in some way, at least at some point in time. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And with the, the men's circles that I've done many times with men that aren't in elders quorum, you'll get somebody that's courageous enough to be the first one to say, Hey, I'm struggling with pornography, or my financial situation is not good, or I'm not sure how I feel about the church even. Mm-Hmm. And if you'll get somebody in another school that's courageous enough to save some of these things, you'll see all these heads poke up. Like, wait, what? Yeah. We're talking about those things. Oh yeah, me too. You know, whatever it is. I'm struggling with that too. I just wasn't gonna be the first one to say. So. Absolutely. There is hope there. And part of that culture shift is finding men that are courageous enough to say that, to give everybody else the subconscious permission they're looking for to do the same. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:09:48 As far as like, just talk to me about like, the concept of brotherhood, which for me, like I always thought I had brotherhood. Like I'm generally, you do, there's sort of, I think most men have sort of these superficial relationships, you know, the guys at work, maybe you know, the literal blood brothers, right. That you see the family dinner, whatever. But what does brotherhood like, what does that really look like?

Speaker 2 00:10:09 You know, if you go back over time, even 60 years ago, if you've seen the show, the Flintstones, for example, Uhhuh <laugh>, you had Barney and Fred and they'd go to the water Buffalo Lodge <laugh>. That's right. Right. And they'd go do these things, wear those hat together, they'd wear the big hats. And obviously it's referring to like the Shriners and

some of these other brotherhoods and organizations, fraternities, brotherhoods, these are not new concepts. If you look back into tribes and villages and the ways that so many people interacted in those smaller settings, even, you know, old towns men were going to work together, their sons were going with them, they were going hunting together. They were in life together. And what 2020 did in a horrible, and also really important way is it fast forwarded how isolated we've become as men. Mm. And so, you know, people say, so what you, it's it's brotherhood. Yeah. It's an opportunity for men to connect outside sports outside, outside of work. And generally that's about it. Mm-Hmm. A younger generation, there might be like the bar scene or the dance club scene, or, you know, whatever that is. Yeah, yeah. But there are just very few pa places where men connect, especially in any kind of authentic way.

Speaker 1 00:11:21 Yeah. And then there's this feeling of like, the idea brotherhood's cool, like, you know, I'm good. Like, yeah, I've got problems, but like, I'm good. Right. And then there's this sort of heavy presence of the family. Like, Joe, listen, you gotta be home with your family. You gotta be present there. You know, the kids are going through a tough time or really tough years. So then there's this overwhelm of the, the man feeling like, no, I don't have time for brotherhood. I need to be with my family. What, what comes to mind with that dynamic?

Speaker 2 00:11:50 Yeah. Well, two things. One, our culture, again, over the past century has really shifted into this idea of the lone wolf. Hmm. And you remember growing up in the eighties and nineties, it was pretty like, cool. You'd have the T-shirt with the wolf on it, Uhhuh <laugh>, you'd have maybe the poster in the room. And it was like, I'm a lone wolf. And we convinced men that not only did they not need anybody, but that needing somebody meant you were weak. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so we glorified this idea of, I can do it all on my own. And then as you get older and your responsibilities are increased with a family, with jobs, with different things that you have, we took that mindset of lone wolf with us. And we have even less time for ourselves. We have even less time for connection and brotherhood. And that is by far, the number one thing that men tell me is their obstacle to connecting with each other is, well, I just don't have time. Mm. And we've developed this really kind of glorification of the masochist where if I'm not suffering, that must mean I'm not doing enough. Mm. And you know, we can go further into that, but that's really a lot of what that's about. I have to bleed myself dry for other people, and if I'm not, well, then I'm not just doing, I'm not doing enough.

Speaker 1 00:12:59 Yeah. And so I don't get time for brotherhood because I got too busy bleeding dry. Yeah. You know, you talk about like our, our ancestors, the way villages worked. Right. Or even, you know, we think of the greatest generation where these are men who went to war. Right. And I just finished watching, um, I know it took me so long to watch this, but the, the Band of Brothers series, and I mean, so inspiring. See these men coming together and, and the connection they build, and there's literally sitting in foxholes, you know, fighting the enemy and we're in 2024. Like, I really, I know we live in a crazy world, but it's like a different crazy, right. I don't expect like all of our young men to be drafted into the army and sent overseas and fight the sea power. And even if they were drafted, they'd just be flying drones or something.

Speaker 1 00:13:40 Right. Where at the same time, like, we need like that connection with men to like go to war with them, go to battle, because there is a battle. We, we were born into a

world at war, but we often don't realize that. So we think like, well, why don't I need brotherhood? Like, it's not like we're gonna go to war together. Like you're at war together. Right. And so just that need of, and that's why I'm, I'm really wrestling with trying to help men understand like, you know, you need brotherhood. Yeah. Family's great and yeah, you need to be there for 'em. But it's the brotherhood where you almost like can re renew and strength so that you can return to the family Yeah. And predict the family and be present with the family and be you rather than like a dad pass out again. He just has nothing left to give, you know? Yeah. It's

Speaker 2 00:14:21 Tough. You know, the idea of the warrior is one of those things that's, I believe needs to be reframed and kind of redefined. Not to say that there aren't conflicts. Not to say that there aren't opposing forces, but generally speaking, the war that we fight, the battle that we fight, fight is mostly against ourselves. And that's one of the things that's important to me in brotherhood and in the brotherhoods that I've created. We need to come gather together as Republicans against the Democrats, <laugh>, or we need to gather together as X group against this group. And a lot of people drive fidelity towards their organization by saying it's us against them. And for me, the idea of brotherhood is it's me against me and I want to be the best version of myself, and will you help me be the best version of myself? So when we go to war together every day, when we have this, this cause that we're fighting for, it's still personal evolution, but we're doing that together. And so when I help you be a better version of you, and you help you, you help me be a better version of me, that creates connection. Yeah. And that's exciting, that's sustainable for me.

Speaker 1 00:15:30 Yeah. That's really helpful. What would you say, like if an elders quorum presidency's listening, it's like, okay, I get it, Joe, like brotherhood, like how would you coach them on? Just like, how, how can we stimulate that more in the setting of Elders Quorum? Because we sort of have this model of like, this guy stands up, calls em, some say prayer, there's announcements, then we jump into the general conference talk, and then we go pick our kids up and go home. Like, that's like the general model. So how would you coach a elders quorum presidency to reunite this sense of brotherhood in a quorum setting?

Speaker 2 00:16:01 So, as actually spoken with a few other squirm presidents about this, the first piece of advice I've given is take off your own mask. Mm. Which as a leader is a really scary thing to do. So well, I'm the one that's supposed to have it all together so I can help everybody else keep it all together. And that's exactly what's kind of killing this. Mm. So if I am the elders quorum president and I get up and I'm authentic and I'm honest, and they say, guys, I don't wanna be here today. I'm really struggling. I'm struggling with this. Or I'm not enthused about this, or I'm really upset with my wife, or I'm really worried about these things with my kids, whatever it is. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, if you'll be the first one to lead with that authenticity, inevitably others will follow. And that doesn't mean you have to throw away the script as far as how we do classes and some of those things, but I would instruct the instructors to do the same thing, what you're teaching here, use this as your, your format and then talk about it in real life. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> talk about your own life and what this is and how you are dealing with this thing, how you're struggling or how you've overcome whatever thing that's there. Hmm. And if we can start just, just with authentic conversation that has a huge impact and the

connection that I feel to you when I know, wait, you're not perfect either, man, that changes everything. Yeah. That's the first place. That's

Speaker 1 00:17:21 Cool. That's cool. Now you, this journey of yours sort of led you into creating, is it Utah Men's Circle? Is that what it's

Speaker 2 00:17:27 Called? Yeah. It started with Utah Men's Circle and Utah Men's Circle. It's a, a free gathering that we do twice a month. It's the first Monday of every month in the third Wednesday. And we've just, we've been all over the valley. Uh, we find libraries or parks or backyards or whatever it is. And we'll get anywhere from 40 to 80 men together. And it's an opportunity for two and a half hours to talk about real life. Hmm. And we'll start with a check-in what's my name and what's present for me? What am I feeling? Because many men haven't thought about that in months <laugh>. That's so true. So you, you'll see it so, so many times and it's someone's turned to speak. Well, my name is Bill and, and what am I feeling? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And they have to, I think I'm feeling kind of sad or I think there's some fear and just seeing them do that. Mm. And then I don't say, aha. See you're weak. You're feeling fear <laugh>. I'm actually saying. Oh, me too. Yeah. It's not just you and it's not just me, but it's this opportunity that we have to get together in, in those ways a couple times a month. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:18:30 Those times. I really appreciate that because sometimes there's this feeling of like, okay, so an elders quorum may have to be like, alright, everybody turn to your neighbor and tell them you're struggling with. And it's like, I don't wanna do that. But even just inviting the men to like, just be going a place, even in your own mind, like, what are you feeling? What are you struggling with? Like that exercise alone sort of shakes 'em out of their, you know, their the haziness and their, their brain and thinking like, oh yeah, I am kind of feeling sort of weighed down. Like it has been a tough week. And I just, I just came to church 'cause that's just what I do. And, but now I'm thinking about it like, wow, that's heavy. You know? And then not that everybody needs to share, but there, I've seen it time and time again, you're, you can invite them. Does anybody wanna share? And there'll be that one brave soul that raises hand and then that guy's like, well, if he did it, I could share. And then it's amazing what men will do to open up and you just invite them. You don't force them. Right. Yeah. But it's, it's amazing. So in this, these men's circles, you sort of sort of start there. Anything else with the structure of, of these gatherings?

Speaker 2 00:19:29 We'll generally try to break out into groups of three or four so that men have a, a deeper opportunity to connect with a few other men. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And again, it, it's always very quiet, very standoffish at first. And then as we introduce these smaller groups and they start talking about just life, okay, each one of you has two minutes to talk about this thing. You're always like, okay, like, let's stop. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> because, oh man, the, the door has finally opened. I can talk about this stuff. And it's really beautiful to witness. And then we've had lots of different kind of exercises and things we'll do. There might be a guided meditation or, you know, a lot of different things that we'll do like that Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> that just give men a chance to slow down and to think and to feel in a way that we're not accustomed to doing. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:20:13 Now these are concerns, just general gatherings. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Is there a, a god component to it or do you just invite men to show up where they're at?

Speaker 2 00:20:21 Yeah. There's not really any kind of ideology or dogma. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> within the Utah men circle, you come as you are. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so as they're in Utah, we have people from all ranges within the church Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> those that are highly active to those that have never even heard of it. And it's the beautiful thing that they get to come together because you'll have people that have, have left the church that are having these deep conversations with somebody that's very devout to it. It Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And they get to talk and they get to share. And we created an environment that I don't think really exists in the world today where we don't have to have to agree and we can still love each other and respect each other. And it's one of the things that I think really makes that a unique space for myself, I believe for, for anybody some sort of belief in a higher power serves you as you do that type of work. Mm. Embodying healthy masculinity, but it's not something that we require, you know, to be x, y, z to come join us. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:21:19 That makes sense. And then is last about an hour or what, what would you say? No,

Speaker 2 00:21:23 We'll start at about six 30 and at nine o'clock we kind of end the official thing. Oh, cool. And then wherever we're at, 30 or 40 minutes, the guys can kind of Yeah. Hang out and chat a little bit more after

Speaker 1 00:21:34 That. Yeah. And so, and again, it's twice a month that you did this. Right? Yeah. And this is something, I mean, and this is sort of sometimes we feel like there's this pressure as elders quorum ies, like, we gotta solve the problem within Elders quorum like that 45 minutes or so. Right. But sometimes it's even easier, you know, go to Elders Quorum, talk about the general conference talk, get into it, but even having a secondary location that's be more casual that make, I can show up how they most comfortable maybe without the tie. Yeah. And sure. And, and just have that type of experience too. Right. They, and it's just gathering 'em and starting the conversation. Right. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:22:10 And I, I believe that that existed more than it does today, where we would even during the week, have more kind of activities Yeah. For the elders quorum, whether that was skeet shooting or, you know, go watch the game together, whatever the thing was, the thing doesn't matter so much as the fact that we get to get together and talk Yeah. And be connected. Yeah. And I think that there are still some other swarms that do that, but I know for a lot of them it becomes about the activity more than let's have the conversation during the activity.

Speaker 1 00:22:39 Yeah. Right. We were more worried that someone brought the treats or Yeah. Rather than just having the experience. Right. And, and that's the thing is that like, remove the responsibility of, you know, like you said, just show up at a park or you don't have to



like clean your house and threaten your kids to be quiet, you know, all these things just like, just make it as easy as possible, but get those men together.

Speaker 2 00:22:59 Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:23:00 Anything else worth mentioning as far as the, the need for brotherhood beyond Elders Quorum?

Speaker 2 00:23:05 Again, having done this work really all over the world, and then for the past couple of years, focusing specifically in Utah, outside of the Elders quorum, there are a lot of members of the church that, that aren't going, that aren't actively engaged there. And when you can create the environment to still get together and just talk, not necessarily even having to preach that falls into place for those that want to go there. For those that want understand that those that want to reengage in that aspect of life that happens. But just creating a place for everybody in your work boundary to get together and say, I don't care if you are active, I don't care if you're even a member, come here and experience brotherhood. Mm. And if you do that, the connection is inevitable. And in that connection then there's opportunities, I believe, for nurturing a lot more personal belief or bearing testimony or, you know, things like that as well. And not that that's ever even the motive, but I think when we start with that, we're gonna do this activity so that we can bring people back to church that's felt if it's, we're gonna do this activity so that we can unite and connect. And then inevitably, some people will realize that they want this more often. They, they wanna reconnect to other men, to God, to themselves, to their testimony that that will happen.

Speaker 1 00:24:26 Yeah. Yeah. And that's the thing, like sometimes we, we have such a tradition of formalizing meetings or gatherings, right. Who has the opening prayer, the closing prayer, like who's presiding, right? Like, having these more casual gatherings can really be frank for people, even to the point of like, uh, you know, there, there's me and this other brother in my ward. We've been doing these like guys movie nights during the week, but we do it like we're not, neither of us are in the elders quorum presidency or, but we're just doing 'em and inviting men to come. But there's almost, that's almost like an advantage to us of like, no, we're just like gathering and there's no, like, obviously we're in Utah, so it's like everybody in the neighborhood, so it goes to church, but, but there's no feeling of like, this is a churchy thing or a spiritual thing.

Speaker 1 00:25:08 We're just gathering men. And even this past week we thought, well, why don't we like, because we always felt like there's this more energy around connecting as men rather than getting to the movie. Yeah. Even though it's a cool guy movie or whatever. Right. And so we thought, Hey, why don't this week we just, he had the idea, let's have like a, a hot sauce gathering every, we bring in our favorite hot sauce, we get some wings going or whatever, but let's not worry about getting to the movie. Let's just chat. Maybe it's an hour, maybe it's longer, but we're just gathering, we're just chatting. And I've even had the thought of inviting non-members in the area. 'cause it's, there's not this worry of like, then they're like, they'll turn on the spiritual thing or like, you know, there'll be a testimony meeting. It's just no, we're just gathering. Right. And that, that's the beginning of maybe some of those men will be

like, you know, I kind of feel like I need more God in my life. Well join us on Sunday. You know? Yeah. And, but it's just that, that simple gathering of, it's not so formalized,

Speaker 2 00:25:57 You know? Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:25:58 Talk to me about, and you've touched on this a little bit, this, this feeling of vilification of men, and this is maybe a broader society discussion, or how would you unpack it?

Speaker 2 00:26:06 Yeah. And this is one of those places where I feel like even talking about it is kind of painting a target on your back. <laugh>,

Speaker 1 00:26:13 You're gonna get canceled, Joe. Yeah. Right.

Speaker 2 00:26:15 As I'm a white heterosexual Christian, middle-aged man, <laugh>. Like, I'm all the things that is wrong with the world according to a lot of the world. Yeah. Yeah. It's really been interesting to step into different organizations where there is more diversity within masculinity, and whether that's skin color or personal belief or orientation or social class or economic class, and getting these men together, inevitably, one of the biggest stressors on men is this feeling of blame. And that anything and everything that is experienced in the world is somehow my fault. And I'm really trying hard to do all the right things. And I'm really trying hard to show up in good ways. And I'm really trying hard to love my family and love my neighbor and do these things. And it still feels like whenever anything goes wrong, it's on me. And I kind of get lumped into this big group that is, is the problem of society.

Speaker 2 00:27:17 And we know why, we know how men have shown up in the past, historically, we know where men have been misaligned. We know the problems that we've caused. And there are so many men that are doing things differently, but are still feeling like not only am I accountable for all of my actions, but I'm accountable for how everybody feels. Mm. And you know, we can dive into that kind of redefining accountability and this idea of the nice guy where I'm trying to manage everything outside of myself. Right. But in this vilification of the masculine, a lot of men that I talk to are like, you know, I just wanna go live in a cabin in the middle of the woods and not talk to anybody ever. Yeah. And there are a lot of men that do that. And so rather than doing that and isolating further, we're gathering together and saying, what can we look at in ourselves? What can we improve on? And also, what aren't we going to take accountability for that exists outside of ourselves? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But it's exhausting a lot of men. And I believe this is one of the primary reasons why the suicide rate is so much higher in men and so much higher in men, 30 to 50 years old than really any other large demographic like that in the world. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:28:30 Yeah. You know, that's, it's interesting how you bring up blame. I've never really thought of it that way. We, like, there's just this innate sense of like carrying it. I think it's part of like the, the protector in us. It's like, oh, you need, you need safety, you need protection, and you need me to carry that blame. Okay, I'll carry the blame. You know, when a man is broken, a lot of the coping mechanisms turn into a, to a, some form of abuse, you know,

where men cope through pornography, men cope through seclusion and reject, you know, abandoning the family. Men, you know, a really broken men will be physically abusive or go out and get drunk and, and just cause all sorts of headaches. And then we, we carry that thinking, well, the problem in the world is me. And that's not a healthy place to be in.

Speaker 1 00:29:12 Right. That's, that's fascinating. And, you know, you talk about, here's another, like a, a charged term of toxic masculinity. Right. And I think a lot of us don't realize it's on a spectrum where on one side you have that mean, you know, the guy who cuts you off and swears and is just a vile person to be around. But oftentimes you don't see the other spectrum where it's that nice guy, it's like, I'm just gonna be nice. And that, that's a toxic place to be in as well when they're overly nice and trying to control you through their behaviors. And no, we want the real person. Right. You know, in, in the middle. And, and, and so it's really easy to vilify masculinity when we see it in these unhealthy, toxic places. Right,

Speaker 2 00:29:57 Right. Well, we've, as a society, we've kind of come up with two terms to throw at anything that a man is doing that we don't like. One of them is toxic masculinity, the other is the patriarchy. Hmm. If there's anything that happens that, that I'm not a fan of, it's pretty easy to blame toxic masculinity or the patriarchy. And that requires no logical explanation. <laugh>, that requires no definition. I just, oh, that it's just toxic. It's just toxic masculinity. And I'd be like, oh, okay. I, I, I guess. Right. But you're right, it is on a spectrum. And that's one of the things that I've taught a lot about with men is, again, going back to the warrior, there are these different, like masculine archetypes and the warrior in his fullness, he gets things done. He is driven, he's ambitious, he is moving forward in his life and moving community society forward in real beautiful ways as well. And then because we are mortal, because we've experienced wound and conditioning in so many things, we'll either go into that sadist, which is, I'm going to hurt you before you can hurt me. Oh, yeah. Or the masochist, which is, I'm going to hurt me before you can hurt me. Mm.

Speaker 1 00:31:03 Interesting.

Speaker 2 00:31:03 And neither of those are healthy. That's the closest is we get to this term of toxic masculinity in that particular archetype. And so when we are there, it's not a matter of like, oh, you're bad. It's a matter of you need to realign with healthy. So I've, I've moved a lot away from this idea of right and wrong and more to realigning. And if you'll, you know, if you go back into the etymology of even the word sin in Greek, the word sin means to miss the mark. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so if I'm missing the mark, well then what do I need to do? I need to realign to the mark. And whether that's in this king energy or a warrior, you know, these different terms that we have. Am I in alignment? Am I aligned with a higher purpose? Am I aligned with God? Am I aligned with who I want to be? Or am I out of alignment? And if I'm out of alignment, it's not, well I guess then it's, you know, get down on myself and self deprecate and stuff. It's just the recognition and getting back on track.

Speaker 1 00:32:01 Yeah. And with that alignment, like it's so easy to default to behaviors, they're out of line. Like, is there, what more can you teach us about this concept of alignment? I think it, we sometimes go to church with a sense of, or engage in re a religious tradition with a

sense of, well, it's gotta get my behaviors in check. Right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, if I can just stop the porn, maybe that will get me in alignment, but is there more to alignment or how would you describe it?

Speaker 2 00:32:25 Absolutely. So much of alignment to me has to do with you knowing where you're going. And the commandments are great benchmarks. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> really for anybody, a lot of the things that are taught there, it's really important. But if you don't know why you are doing it, your tendency to get out of alignment with it comes very quickly and very, uh, subconsciously at times. So if the only reason, for example, I don't drink alcohol is because I can't, is because I'm told I'm not supposed to. Well then that's not a very sustainable reason to be doing that <laugh>. Right. If the reason I study the scriptures is because, well then I can check it off the box and say, I did that during the day, that's not gonna be a very sustainable reason. So one of the things that I encourage a lot of men to do is not just look at what you're doing or how you're doing it, but to get clear as to why Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And that to me has so much more to do with staying in alignment. If I wake up in the morning and I have a reason why to be awake, the reason why to do things, then it's easier for me to recognize when I'm getting off the path.

Speaker 1 00:33:27 Yeah. And then that purpose, that that why rather than just, well, I'm only accepted if I do these behaviors, so I better align these behaviors when a reality is the purpose of an identity of it. Right. That I'm like, like God knows me, he created me. Like he has a purpose for me. Like that, that's where the, the healthy masculinist pours out of a

Speaker 2 00:33:46 Man. Absolutely. Yeah. One of the other archetypes that gets thrown around a lot in masculinity and in what you could term toxic masculinity. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> is king. You get these organizations that everybody's a king. We call each other king. I call myself a king. And the whole organization's not being a king. But the idea of a king usually comes from more of the unrighteous idea of a king, which is, this is about my personal glorification and this is about how amazing I'm mm-Hmm. And about how many people are worshipping me and how much land I have. And, you know, all these different things. As I talk with men about kind of claiming your kingdom and being a king in alignment, it's again, identifying who I am. Mm-Hmm. What is the standard that I hold myself to, and that I hold myself to that first. So a lot of the men that I talk with are single looking to date.

Speaker 2 00:34:37 And a lot of lot of conversations that I have are actually with women who say, where are all the good guys? Hmm. Where are all the men that, you know, I can date, that I can trust? And one of the first things I say is, when you're talking to him, say, what standard do you hold yourself to? What is your code of conduct for yourself? If a man can say, this is who I'm, this is what I'm about, that is your kingdom. And as you live that, then you can invite other people into it. So King Benjamin is a great example. King Benjamin knew exactly who he was. He knew what his kingdom was about. He knew how he was gonna show up in his kingdom. And so when it was time for him to not be king anymore, it wasn't this mad grasp for power and no, I, I need to keep this for as long as possible and tyranny and all these different things.

Speaker 2 00:35:22 It was, yeah. I have done the thing that I have been here to do. I have served, I have led and those were the same thing. And I've done that from a motivation of love Yeah. And provision and, and ordering that to me is so much of the king energy within masculinity and not really the way that we've come to define it in the world today. So if you're looking at yourself saying, I wanna be a king, it starts with you. How do you live your own life? What standard do you hold yourself to? Because you, you can't rule over or lead anybody if you can't yourself first.

Speaker 1 00:35:55 Yeah. That's powerful, that framing. 'cause I think every young man, I mean, I <laugh> I think everybody goes to this space decided, you know, like maybe after the mission or or after high school where you're like, I'm gonna be rich and I'm gonna be super rich and I'm gonna like lead corporations and, you know, and then, and that can lead down these paths of like, I'm gonna be king and people are gonna worship what I do. And, and, uh, even though we may not frame it that way, like that's sort of the, the seed of masculinity. But again, it's in these alignment in these paths where we find what true royalty is, you know, as we, especially as we've all ducking Jesus Christ. Right.

Speaker 2 00:36:32 Absolutely.

Speaker 1 00:36:32 That he's always, he is always the one we're, we're reaching towards, not necessarily, you know, our manifestation of it.

Speaker 2 00:36:39 So certainly.

Speaker 1 00:36:39 Yeah. Yeah. Tell me about like, rites of passage, you know, 'cause I think we have a beautiful tradition of what many could say rites of passage you think of, uh, the young deacons. You know, it's like, like that's sort of the bestow of, of manhood a little bit. Like you have the priesthood now, like, and you know, we grandma and grandpa come to the church and you get ordained and that's great. But, uh, anything else that we should understand about rites of passages in terms of manhood?

Speaker 2 00:37:05 Again, as you go back a hundred years or, or further rites of passage were a lot more clearly defined for men now serving a mission serves as, as somewhat of a rite of passage. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, obviously you leave your family, you leave your home. Oftentimes you go into this strange foreign land, sometimes even speaking another language. And you're there in the name of service, you're there in the name of Christ to, to serve and to love. And that is beautiful and it's really important. But what we see so much in the world today is so many young men in this failure to launch where I'm 26, 27, 28, and I, I still kinda live in mom's basement. Not that there's something inherently wrong with that. Sure. But that I'm still kind of acting like I was when I was 16 and 17. I do the bare minimum, the, you know, four hours a day part-time job.

Speaker 2 00:37:57 And then I come home and I'm on my Xbox for 8, 9, 10 hours a day. You know? And as a society, we've lost a lot of these rites of passage for young men. And so, again, so much of the conversations that I have are with women that are saying, I wish my husband

would just step up. Mm-Hmm. I wish my partner would just like, be a man and lead our family. And the men are telling me, I don't know what that means. I don't know what that looks like. So I think as parents, it's an important thing. And for myself, I've realized having four teenagers, three teenage sons, I came to the realization that I'd been enabling them too much. And I'd done it from a place of love. I cared about them. And I saw the ways that I was so unfairly treated as a, as a teenager by my parents and feel, well, I'm not gonna do it that way. I'm gonna do it this way instead. And again, the pendulum sometimes goes too far the other direction. Where are we giving our young men these opportunities really beyond just like the token moment of, yeah, hey, now you're a deacon or now you're a teacher, but what does that actually mean? And what are you going to do with that? What are your responsibilities here? What are you going to step into so that when a young man is 18, 19, 20, 21, he's willing to step from that boyhood into the manhood. Yeah. Mindset.

Speaker 1 00:39:16 And, and there's really, you know, we sort of have these events like you mentioned like you just turned 11, or it's January and you're gonna turn 12. Right. This is that you're right of passage. But there's on these little nuances as you're raising men or young men. And have you read the Intentional Father? I have. It's by, uh, John Tyson. Actually, someone I interviewed turned me onto it and I read it and it's just phenomenal. He actually, he's a Christian Guy. He actually shouts out the Latterday Saints for 'cause of our mission program. 'cause it is such a rite of passage. But there's all these other like mini steps that you can do with, with young men so that they feel that enabling of like, oh, I'm stepping in the manhood here. So that when that time comes, they're not like, Joe, what does that even mean? I don't know how to step up. I wanna step up, but what do I do? You know, where's the step? Yeah. So there's a lot of tools to think, resources you can look to for that. Right.

Speaker 2 00:40:07 Absolutely.

Speaker 1 00:40:07 So tell me about resources as far as if like people like they want to either be that father or they don't know how to step up. They don't know how to answer that question themselves as a man. Any resources you turn 'em to.

Speaker 2 00:40:18 Yeah. I love the idea of retreats. And retreats are, are very popular in the world today. You go into these three to four day events. I serve with this organization for a number of years where I was at many of these and facilitated quite a few. And they're really important. They can be really great catalysts towards change. But just like anything else in life, a three or four day experience does not create something sustainable. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So what I've created with this, the Alies guard is what it's called. It's this group of men that is consistently, not constantly but consistently gathering, checking ourselves, checking each other, finding men, finding resources that have done some of these things Mm-hmm. <affirmative> that have been in many of these places where you are, are you willing to look at yourself and say, there is something about me that I would like to shift and there's somebody out there that can probably help me do that.

Speaker 2 00:41:12 That's not the, the current male culture. So when we're willing to do that and we find a, a coach, we find a group of men, we find a brother, we find an organization,

whatever it might be that can help us in that. And at the very least just hold us in the realization that we don't have it. Because that's a, a hard thing to navigate. Sometimes there's a lot of self-judgment, there's a lot of blame and shame that comes with that. Generally self-imposed. But sometimes externally as well, there are resources, there are places that you can go to start to level up in your life to start to really step into the capacity of who you know you are. And you're right, it has very little to do with leading organizations and having the millions of dollars and having a six pack is awesome. <laugh> driving a Lamborghini is awesome, but those are the things that we've been sold Yeah. Equal masculinity. And very rarely does this actually have anything to do with it. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:42:05 Talk to me about unrighteous dominion. This is, uh, this may be the, the term we use instead of toxic masculinity Yeah. Is unrighteous dominion. It usually gets pinned to a, a male figure rather than a female. But, you know, anything else that we haven't mentioned with unrighteous dominion?

Speaker 2 00:42:20 Yeah, I think that's important to, again, be able to define clearly what that actually means. Because if it's anything that a man is doing, whether that is my brother, my dad, my spouse, my bishop, my stake president that I don't like, that doesn't equal unrighteous dominion. That doesn't always equal unrighteous dominion or toxic masculinity. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> or this patriarchy. And so coming up with a clearly defined definition of that to then be able to talk about it is what allows us to evolve and allows us to communicate in a good way. But that's not what most people are experiencing. Most people are experiencing why just was told this. And so I need to shift that. I need to change that, but without definitions of what it is, I dunno what to do about it.

Speaker 1 00:43:10 Yeah. And then we, we just like toxic patriarchy, we sort of throw these terms around, but there's, there's more going on. Right. That we should consider. Yeah. Any other, any other point principle story concept as

Speaker 2 00:43:21 I've gone through this work, I had a realization a couple years ago about an experience that I had when I was like 10 years old. And it was 10 years old and there's a Harmons on 35th South and 40th west right there. Uhhuh <affirmative>. That was like the Harmons that my family always went to. So was there It was a grocery store. Yeah. Grocery store. Yeah. Was there with my father and I stole a candy bar and I got caught stealing the candy bar. So there was an awkward rest of the trip with my dad, you know, gave the candy bar back, but very, very silent. And we got home. And what I learned in that experience in that moment was, well, my mother was very sad because, you know, my dad told her about it. My dad was very upset, the store was very upset, and God was very upset with me.

Speaker 2 00:44:10 And I learned in that moment that the thing that I needed to do to continue to be accepted, to continue to be part of my family and part of the, you know, people around me, is I needed to make sure my mom felt better and I needed to make sure my dad felt better and that God felt better and that the store felt better. No one really ever asked me why I stole the candy bar. And if, if I was asked, it wasn't asked in a very like, <laugh> inviting way, you know? Yeah. Yeah. That was one of the first experiences that points to me, the ways that

we teach really everyone. But I know young men specifically, what you do is not so much the problem. It's how everybody else feels about the thing that you're doing. And that is, I believe one of the biggest thing that's hurting men in our day and age is it's this idea that everything that I do is to maintain somebody else's emotional state, to maintain somebody's perception of me.

Speaker 2 00:45:03 And if I actually just get to consider like, why did I sell that candy bar? Why does that matter? Why should I not do that? And then I have that realization, I can still hold space for everybody's emotions around it, but when you make someone else responsible for your emotion, it's not sustainable. One, because your emotion might change the next day how you feel about something. Right. So I, I use that story quite often because men will come to me and say, here's where I'm at in life. And I'm miserable because this person is miserable. And I'm miserable because this person isn't happy and I'm miserable because what I do here is never enough. Hmm. So, okay, why do you do all of those things? And so when we go inward and we develop self-awareness and we develop our relationship more with God, and that higher awareness, higher power, then we're able to orient ourselves to the reasons we do the things that we do. And the way that everybody else feels about it becomes a lot more sustainable as well, because we're, we're in alignment. So that feels important to me. Yeah. 'cause that is, so much of brotherhood is giving permission to say, I can be here for you and what you tell me, I'm not gonna shame you. I'm not gonna blame you, I'm not gonna judge you. I'm here for it. And if it's not something you wanna do anymore, let's figure that out. Game changer. Yeah. Everything changes. Yeah. And it feels really good to operate from that place.

Speaker 1 00:46:22 Yeah. You know, and I've just found that every man has that candy bar or a candy bar story, right. Or a moment in their past where they go to and it's like, I received a certain message here that impacted how I show, how I've revealed my masculinity for the rest of my life. And it's, and through this brotherhood and things where, and come together and recognize that and be like, oh, you mean <laugh>? I don't have to carry these chains anymore. You know? And a lot of times it leads to further behavior of these things that don't make sense. Like, why would you look at the porn? Why would you do this or that? Like, it's, you know, but nobody asks why you do it. It's more of like, you did it. Like, that's ter like it makes me feel bad when you did that. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Powerful, powerful concept. So if people want know more about your Utah Men circle or resources you provide, where, where's a good starting point?

Speaker 2 00:47:08 So there's the typical Instagram, Facebook, you can search Utah Men Circle. You can search Joe Spearin, you can search Alga, alies guard. You can also go to guard com, Utah mend circle com and, and find all the information there as

Speaker 1 00:47:22 Well. And like you said, the men circles are free, like, uh, um, twice a month, just show up,

Speaker 2 00:47:25 Mend circles free, give it a go. I did that intentionally because, 'cause I, I didn't want any man to say, well, the only reason you care about me being here is because I paid money. Yeah, yeah. Got rid of that excuse. Yeah. So, yeah,



Speaker 1 00:47:36 I encourage people to check it out and try. So last question I have for you is, I mean, you're in this, on this journey of, it's in one form leadership of Stepping Up and, you know, nobody sat you down in office and bat in an oak desk and said, we'd like to call you as the Young Utah Men's Circle guy <laugh>. But you, you stepped up into this role. So how has this journey helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Speaker 2 00:47:59 There's a beautiful story. President Uchtdorf, elder Uchtdorf tells about this group of men that are trying to move a piano from a general conference from years ago. And they can't move it. They can't move it, they can't move it. And eventually one guy says, everybody stand close together and lift where you stand. And that has been a huge inspiration for me. When I heard that saying, one, the, the calling that I hold is not the thing that defines my ability to lift where I stand, nor do I need to be commanded in all things. I can just be anxiously engaged in a good cause. And as I do that, I feel God's love. I feel inspiration and support in the thing that I do. And as I continue to seek that direction and that inspiration, I have drawn closer to Christ. I've Drawn, drawn closer to my Heavenly Father and feels good to continue to move in that direction for myself.

Speaker 1 00:49:00 Now that we've reached the end of the episode, I quickly wanna thank you for supporting the Leading Saints podcast. There's so much content out there to consider, and you picked this one. If Leading Saints has made an impact in your life, we would sure like to hear about it at [leading.saints.org/contact](http://leading.saints.org/contact). And if you could quickly text or email this episode to a leader, you know, I bet it will bless their life. You can mark off your good turn daily and let's even call it ministering. Okay? Maybe not that far, but seriously. Thank you. And help us share this content. Remember, learn more about disclosing betrayal from Jeff Streger by visiting [leading.saints.org/fourteen](http://leading.saints.org/fourteen).

Speaker 3 00:49:48 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.