



Why Recovering Addicts Make Great Bishops | An Interview with Mike Houghtaling

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Speaker 1 00:00:05 Welcome back to another episode of the Leading Saints Podcast. If you've enjoyed content on this podcast, it's important that I tell you about the Leading Saints newsletter that we send out every week. This newsletter keeps you up to date on all the current leading Saints content releases, including podcasts, articles, online events, and even live events that might be happening in your own area in this newsletter. We also recommend some past episodes and written articles that you don't want to miss each week. We include additional leadership perspectives and thoughts that you can only find in the weekly newsletter. So you definitely don't wanna miss out. To subscribe to the weekly newsletter, simply text the word lead to 4 7 4 7 4 7, or visit leading-saints.org/subscribe.

Speaker 2 00:00:59 I am Rob Hillman. I live in Iowa City, Iowa, originally from Eastern Idaho. And one thing I've appreciated about leading Saints is the feeling that being a leader, being able to have a connection with a savior, um, is something that we do by being active and sort of anxiously engaged in the gospel. And I sort of feel that as I listen to the podcast, um, listen to the interviews, and I feel a genuine sense that, you know, we're all needed at the church through kind of the, the approach that Kurt takes to leading Saints. So I really appreciate the, the work he does.

Speaker 1 00:01:38 Leading Saints is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Latter Day Saints be better prepared to lead. And we do that through various ways, including this very podcast that you're listening to. I hope you subscribe. Maybe you leave this a review while you're at it, and I think you'll enjoy the content you find on this podcast. And then jump on over to leading-saints.org, and you'll find thousands of articles dedicated to leadership context as it

relates to, uh, being a latter day saint. We have virtual summits that we've done, checks it out on social media, and also a weekly newsletter that goes out that has unique content you won't find anywhere else. So, uh, jump into the leading saints world. We're glad to have you.

Speaker 3 00:02:18 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. 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.

Speaker 1 00:02:59 I'm here with Mike Houghtaling. How are you, Mike? I'm

Speaker 4 00:03:02 Great. I'm glad and terrified to be here.

Speaker 1 00:03:04 <laugh>. Now, tell, set the scene here. Like this is a, an atypical, uh, setting for the podcast. I usually record Where are we at and, and what are we doing here? We are

Speaker 4 00:03:13 Just outside of Juan Ship, Utah at Big Canyon Ranch, at a Men's Warrior Heart Bootcamp retreat. And this is the most beautiful place in the world, and we're surrounded by 12 of the most beautiful men in the world.

Speaker 1 00:03:26 <laugh>. That's right. We have a, a live studio audience. Everybody make noise and say hi. Right. Wow. That sounded like almost 24 men, you know, that was good. <laugh>. So, yeah, we've, we've promoted these, these bootcamps on the, the podcast and many, many men are here because of some of those podcasts. The, the promotions we've done. And, uh, yeah. What would, what would you say, Mike, you, you're, you're currently serving as a Bishop Latterday Saints. Here you are. Uh, what I am, why should people check this out? I

Speaker 4 00:03:54 Wish I could bring my entire YSA ward here. Male to the bootcamp. Yeah. And females to the heart of a woman. Yeah. Uh, it is a real deal. It doesn't substitute for anything that we already believe in the church. It doesn't conflict with anything. It, uh, helps me, helped me and helps us to see another side of God that maybe we didn't learn growing up, and maybe we weren't taught exactly this way in the church.

Speaker 1 00:04:17 Yeah, there's, there's, there's beauty in sort of stepping back and maybe taking a different perspective. Right. We,

Speaker 4 00:04:21 That's right. I speak, I speak Spanish, and there's nothing wrong with being bilingual spiritually as well. Hmm. And so I like that being able to see God in this way. It's a beautiful thing.

Speaker 1 00:04:32 Yeah, for

Speaker 4 00:04:33 Sure. It's

Speaker 1 00:04:33 Helpful. So if, if people are listening, wanna check it out. Uh, I've done a few episodes on it there. The one that comes to mind is if you search on leading saints.org for title is, is Elders Quorum Working, and we interview, uh, Steve Shields, James, a lot of the, the presenters here and people who are involved in, and they can give you a better idea. And you go to

Speaker 4 00:04:52 Some of the bootcamp Hero roast. That's

Speaker 1 00:04:53 Right. And then go to a warrior heart.com to get all the details. And, uh, hopefully we'll see him at a future one.

Speaker 4 00:05:00 Don't delay. Uh, next one, I think is in November, 2021. Don't miss the opportunity. That's

Speaker 1 00:05:05 Right. That's right. Well, I wanted, uh, while you're up here, you're originally, you live in Georgia. You, you're not originally from there, but you live in Georgia.

Speaker 4 00:05:12 Yeah, we've been in Georgia a little over 30 years south, just south of Atlanta. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, was an air. I was born in Utah, raised in Seattle, Washington. And, uh, we, my wife and I, after we married, moved, uh, live five years in Seattle, and then we've been in Atlanta for over 30 years. Raised our family there.

Speaker 1 00:05:27 Nice. And you're currently serving as, uh, YSA bishop. Yeah. Right, Bishop. Tell, tell us about the area, like that sort of thing.

Speaker 4 00:05:33 Yeah. We do not have a college or university that brings kids to us, rather, we're like a local ward that we serve two stakes, two family stakes. And, and so our kids come, we have more in the summer than we do in the wintertime, and we'll have 70 or 80 kids attend every Sunday in the summertime. And, uh, it drops off a little in the fall as they're going off back to school, and then it picks back up in the, in the summer. That's cool. So it's a beautiful area. It's super green. Uh, Georgia is a very, very pretty state.

Speaker 1 00:06:03 So you cover two stakes, but you are, you're under the direction of one of those stake presidents, right? Correct.

Speaker 4 00:06:08 Do you want me to name names of, uh, of the stakes? Does it matter? Oh, whatever. Okay. Yeah. Well, we're, I'm the Fayetteville, Georgia YSA ward. We're in the Fayetteville, Georgia stake, but we cover also most of the Newnan Georgia stake, which was just created, uh, less than a year ago. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:06:23 So we've gotten to know each other, just the various boot camps we've been at together. And, uh, I've learned a little bit about your story, not completely, but we got to drive up here. And I heard, uh, you reached out to me the last few weeks, went on and shared with me that you'd recently been called as, as a bishop. And, and I know you have, uh, an

interesting past. Maybe, maybe, uh, uh, I dunno if I would say it atypical or, or, or different, but, uh, you know, we're all, we're all on a journey of, of redemption and sinning and, and, you know, turn into towards Christ. But sometimes we stigmatize some of those pasts. Sometimes we think, yeah, Christ, you know, he heals all, and for forgiveness is real, but maybe certain people shouldn't end up in a high profile, you know, influential callings.

Speaker 1 00:07:04 But I, I really wanna tear that stigma down because I've met so many people who I thought, you know, even people who've lost their membership or their membership been removed, and they've come back and I think, man, nobody better would be a bishop than, you know, I could list, uh, the names of men like that. And, uh, a lot of times that's not, uh, that's not an option, or it, it isn't, we don't let it be an option. So let's go back to the beginning of your story. Uh, where, where does it begin? What's, what was the moment?

Speaker 4 00:07:31 Well, I would remind the listeners that, uh, you should never trust a skinny cook <laugh>. And, uh, so I would never trust a, a two holy bishop. That's, uh, that's what I'll say, <laugh>. None of what I say is a, is about blame. Um, I'm gonna talk about my parents a little bit and how that created some wounds in me growing up and what that did to me, and how I reacted. And they're still alive. And this is not to blame them. They were good people that did the best they could, but it wasn't enough. And that's probably God's plan, is that we have imperfect people around us, so that we will seek him and, and not seek them. But as I identify my wounds, it's, it's not to blame anybody. It's just so that I could identify 'em, examine them, and actually have more love and compassion for them than I did in the midst of my afflictions, if you will. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:08:19 You know, that, I appreciate mentioning that because it's, you know, there are, there are some tragedies out there. There are some abusive parents and people that really made some spiritual wounds that, I mean, nobody would get out of some of those relationships without spiritual wounds. A lot of times it's the wounds I, mortality people doing the, with their best intentions, help, trying to help somebody. And they end up, uh, you know, maybe taking, pushing someone the, the direction they didn't mean to push 'em. Yeah.

Speaker 4 00:08:43 Yeah. Everybody's got problems. And we inflict those on everybody around us. And, and the job is, is, uh, not to blame anybody, but to understand them. And only then can we process something I think can move forward. So, as a young kid, uh, we, I was born in Provo, Utah. We moved to Seattle when I was about six years old. There was a lot of stress and confusion and chaos in our home, A lot going on between mom and dad. Dad in, in the mid sixties, like 1965 or so. He was a 100,000 miler for United Airlines, which today's nothing. But that was a big deal in the mid sixties. He traveled a lot. He was gone a lot. And, and so he was absent. So mom raised six kids. And I think that in dad's absence, mom tried to create strong emotional bonds to get support from us kids. There was no sexual abuse or, or beatings or anything like that. But I think there was an emotional incest, is the way that I describe it.

Speaker 1 00:09:38 Yeah. And that's a, I mean, that's a clinical term. Is it? I mean, a therapist will use that term.

Speaker 4 00:09:42 I've, I've read one book about it. Nobody's, nobody's told me that or diagnosed me with it. That's my self-diagnosis.

Speaker 1 00:09:47 And it's sort of a shocking term, but basically mean that your mother was turning to you for that emotional support,

Speaker 4 00:09:53 Support that she needed and didn't get Yeah. In, in the, in the relationship there. Yeah. Yeah. So from the outside, six kids, we were good looking and smart and talented, and, and we were pretty normal or, or maybe normal plus from the outside. But at home there was a lot of turmoil. And, um, there was, there was, there was a lot

Speaker 1 00:10:11 Going on. And this is, I mean, from the outside looking in, pretty traditional latter

Speaker 4 00:10:14 Family. Sure. Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. Church every Sunday, everybody doing what they're supposed to do for the most part. Yeah. Nobody went to jail, so <laugh>.

Speaker 1 00:10:22 Yeah. Anyway,

Speaker 4 00:10:23 But internally, I didn't know how to handle these emotional difficulties and these triggers. It was hard. And so at a, at a very young age, uh, I began to isolate, feel shame over not being proud of who I was and who they were and stuff. And about 10 years old friend showed me a Playboy magazine. It was the greatest thing I'd ever seen. For me, it was like snorting cocaine. Instantly I was hooked. I knew that I'd do whatever it took for as long as it took me to continue to get that feeling. I know that not everybody that drinks becomes an alcoholic, and not everybody that looks at porn Right. Um, becomes a porn addict. But for me, it was instant. I, at, I'm 10 years old, I'm a cub scout, you know? Yeah. And, um, I have no idea what's happening to me. Yeah. So I used to visit a friend and we'd ride through the woods, and under a log was hidden, a tide box. And I, I discovered there was a stash of Playboy magazines.

Speaker 1 00:11:15 You didn't know whose it was. It was just there.

Speaker 4 00:11:16 Yeah. It was just there. Oh, wow. Uh, he found, it showed me. And, and so I'd visit the tide box often, and my shame got deeper and deeper, and it increased. And, and then doing the addiction became a way to escape the shame. So I don't know if you know which comes first, the chicken or the egg, is it shamer or the addiction? Interesting. But boy, they, they cohabit and they, they really promote each other. And

Speaker 1 00:11:39 Talk, talk me through that, that the initial shame, like, because you were hearing, were you hearing messages at church? Like, you shouldn't look at these things, but you were drawn to it, like it wasn't that Oh,

Speaker 4 00:11:47 Absolutely. Yeah. It was, it was forbidden. It was the wrong thing to do it. I, I was confused. 'cause I had had friends and I used to babysit for some leaders, and I would

see Playboy magazines in, in their home. And I was confused about some of this, but I knew that it was wrong, that I wasn't supposed to be doing it.

Speaker 1 00:12:02 Yeah. Yeah. And it's more of the, uh, that you knew it was wrong, but you wanted it, so,

Speaker 4 00:12:07 Absolutely. Oh, yeah. And that's where

Speaker 1 00:12:08 The shame just, oh

Speaker 4 00:12:09 Yeah. I was, I was outta control again. I started at 10 years old. There was, I didn't know what to do. I was, I could not regulate my emotions or my desires at that point. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:12:19 Wow.

Speaker 4 00:12:20 So that continued. And I remember about 14 years old, I was reading a TV guide. You remember those? Yeah. I remember, I'm born in 1958. So as, uh, early seventies, I'm about 14. I'm reading a TV guide about some rockstar, and he's describing his heroin addiction, the addiction cycle, the guilt, the craving, the, you know, and the acting out. And I realized by reading his heroin story, I am addicted to pornography. And that word had never been put to it to him. And I should say, said I'm 14, my being ordained a deacon was delayed. Gimme time to repent. Like being, I was open with my bishops being ordained, a teacher, a priest, even an elder was delayed in order to give me,

Speaker 1 00:12:59 Was it hard for you the first time to, to open up or, and share that with your bishop, or did you share it with your parents, or, uh,

Speaker 4 00:13:05 It didn't talk about, I got caught by my parents a time or two over the years, but I didn't share it with them. No. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But I was pretty open with my bishop. I wanted help, and I didn't know what the source was. And of course, good bishops, all they could say at the time was, oh, well just stop doing that, and then your depression will go away. Oh, just stop doing that and you'll feel better about yourself. Oh, just stop doing that.

Speaker 1 00:13:26 Like, as if the porn was the source.

Speaker 4 00:13:27 Exactly. Like the porn was the source. Like that was the problem. And of course, that's one of the things I've come to learn is porn's not the issue. Porn's a symptom.

Speaker 1 00:13:33 You know, it may like it stimulate that addiction cycle to keep going.

Speaker 4 00:13:37 Right, right, right. But so I thought, well, dub bishop, I, I never thought of not doing that anymore. You know, <laugh>

Speaker 1 00:13:44 Every day.

Speaker 4 00:13:45 Right. Gee, what a good idea. That's a novel idea. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:13:48 So, and this is back in the, in the early sixties.

Speaker 4 00:13:51 Yeah. Yeah. So late sixties, early seventies. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:13:54 I mean, I bet most bishops just, I mean, there's nothing, no perspective. I mean, people weren't openly talking

Speaker 4 00:14:00 About this stuff. There's no discussion. The idea of quote addiction, it was just, uh, it was just weakness. It was just bad habits. It was just, uh, you know, uh, compulsive behavior maybe. But there was no real discussion of addiction in conference or in church meetings

Speaker 1 00:14:14 Or anything like that. And again, going back to the best intentions, your bishop Oh yeah. Said

Speaker 4 00:14:17 Those things. Oh, yeah. Good people. Well, great people. And I love them. And they, they, they give the best guidance they had. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But it wasn't good enough. Yeah. So

Speaker 1 00:14:26 It's a mission. Yeah. So you get up to your mission, everything just gets pushed back, know,

Speaker 4 00:14:30 Advancements, everything. The email, my mission call, I screwed up again. Shortly after I had my mission call, before I was supposed to report, went talk to the bishop. He called to stake president, they called Salt Lake. Well, if he can just hang on until he reports to the MTC, we'll still let him go. And so I go on my mission and, and where'd you go? Argentina. Okay. Cordoba, Argentina, RG best mission in the world. Awesome. Had a great mission president, great companions. And stayed clean for most of my mission, probably 20 months. Yeah. And then in the end fell on my mission. And for me,

Speaker 1 00:15:05 When you say stay clean, what do you mean with pornography

Speaker 4 00:15:07 Or masturbation? I, I didn't seek pornography. I didn't masturbate. Yep. And, and so I, but then having that occur again at the end of my mission, then that made my entire mission a failure for me. Hmm. Increased the shame, increase the, the

Speaker 1 00:15:21 Man you just hear the adversary's message in that. Right. Like the rest of the 20 months, flush it down the toilet. Right. It doesn't, yeah. Wow. Doesn't count. Yeah. That's how powerful shame is. Oh, yeah.

Speaker 4 00:15:31 Absolutely. None of that counted. And part of that's, you know, our LDS culture and our misunderstanding of, you know, all the sins return, if we go back to our Oh yeah. Back. That's not what that means. But, but I didn't know that at the time. Yeah. So I came home, I remember even telling the mission prep. Well, I mean, I came home one time, but I remember telling the mission President, I'm not even gonna ask you for a temp recommend. And I, I told

him what I'd done. And, and he said, well, that's up to you. And, uh, so I come home, my shame's deeper than ever. And I, because

Speaker 1 00:16:00 You can't even keep it together when you're a missionary. Right. Like, that's the shame.

Speaker 4 00:16:02 Right. You must really, really be a bad person. And see, that's the message I'm getting all through these first 20, 21 years of my life, is that, uh, everybody else is normal. I'm the only one that's suffering these things. If, you know, the classic, if you knew who I was, you couldn't love me. I'm a terrible person. I must be like the Jews that spat on Christ. I'm the whited sical with the, the, the bones inside and the rotting flesh. I st. Stink. I'm horrible. And, and nobody else is like this. And if they knew who I was, they couldn't love me. Yeah. And I discovered I didn't love myself. I figured I must hate the savior. I figured he must hate me. Why else would I do this if I wasn't one of those that would have, you know, mocked him and stuff? 'cause I felt like I was mocking.

Speaker 1 00:16:48 Right. Yeah. When, man, I shouldn't do this. And I know I shouldn't, but I still return to it. It's like I'm slapping him in the face. Right. Right, right.

Speaker 4 00:16:55 It's kinda like, uh, mark Twain said, it's easy to quit smoking. I've done it hundreds of times. <laugh>. Right. You know, so I'd, I had quit, uh, pornography every day, every day. Hundreds of times I swore it'd be the last I even had a, a well-meaning home teacher say, have you ever asked the Lord that if you ever did it again, that he would take your life. Oh,

Speaker 1 00:17:12 Wow.

Speaker 4 00:17:12 Okay. That was unhelpful. <laugh>. But

Speaker 1 00:17:16 Again, best intentions somewhere.

Speaker 4 00:17:18 Right? I guess. No, no. Absolutely. And again, I, and I never wanted, I never tried or wanted to commit suicide, but there were many times when I did wish I was dead. I would just wish I didn't have to deal with it. Yeah. Couldn't do it. So I had bishops tell me, Hey, no problem. Once you get married, he can have real sex. Then a pornography won't be an attraction. And then later after marriage, had a stake president trying to work with us, saying that, well, if you had sex every day with Andrea, your wife would, that would solve it. Right. Again, best intentions, but no clue about what's going on. Yeah. So we got engaged, and then my problem surfaced again. You know, I'd gone months and months without, and then my problem surfaced again because it was never solved. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:17:59 Yeah. Right. And did you discuss it with your wife before you got married?

Speaker 4 00:18:02 Well, we delayed our marriage.

Speaker 1 00:18:04 So more delays

Speaker 4 00:18:05 I caught. Yep. More delays. Life's on hold. So I called, I was, I was scheduled to go visit her at Thanksgiving. We were supposed to get married in December. I was living out west, she was in North Carolina. And I called on the phone, cancel, you know, is pre-cell phone. So I couldn't text her the cancellation of our wedding <laugh>. So I called her and said, Hey, I, it's just not gonna work. Talk to you when I get there. And again, more shame, more embarrassment. And so when I got to her over Thanksgiving, then we sat and talked, and I told her everything, told her, uh, everything that I knew about it. She and I agreed with the bishop that once we got married, it wouldn't be a problem. Right. Yeah. Because why would you want pornography if you had real sex? And we had no idea.

Speaker 4 00:18:43 But, so we reset a date and, and delayed a couple of months, and got married, uh, the end of February. And, and life was, life was gonna be good. I was gonna be normal then. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you're free. I was free. It was over. It was over. I came to see my life. And then of course that wasn't true because pornography has nothing to do with sex. Non-addicts won't understand that. But the best analogy I've come up with over the years is that porn has no more to do with sex than alcoholism has to do with thirst. An alcoholic does not drink because he's thirsty. He drinks 'cause he is underlying issues. And a porn addict doesn't look at porn because he needs more sex, or he needs better sex, or he needs a different kind of sex, or he needs other sex partners. A porn addict looks at sex for the same reason that an alcoholic drinks.

Speaker 4 00:19:30 And that's because of unmet needs. I had a counselor tell me 20 years ago, before I was ready to hear it, that he only knew of two ways. And this illustrates that point. He only knew of two ways to get rid of an addiction, and one was to trade it for another addiction. And he said, we see that a lot. I don't recommend it. But the other way was to honestly work a 12 step program. And it was through that and that kind of, that analogy that, and it's true, different addictions have different consequences. Mm-Hmm. Addictions are the same, whether it's cutting porn, anger, gambling, hair pulling, having to be right porn, it, it doesn't matter. Alcohol, drugs, it doesn't matter what the addiction is, the root cause and the root solution is the same, even though consequences are different sometimes. Mm-Hmm.

Speaker 1 00:20:18 <affirmative>. Yeah. Wow. So, uh, how soon after your marriage did you realize maybe you had some slip ups or whatever? Did you think, oh, wow, this didn't go away?

Speaker 4 00:20:27 You know, I don't remember exactly, but it, it would've only been a couple months. Yeah. And, and terrible shame of course, uh, associated with that. I confessed multiple times to my wife through the years. She also caught me a couple of times through the years. I've, you know, left a magazine around or something stupid like that. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And, and she says, I think you wanted to get caught. And maybe I did, but I still wasn't ready to be, to be healed. I didn't, I didn't understand the difference between sobriety and recovery. I thought that, you know, sobriety just not doing it is what I was after. And I didn't realize that there was healing and healing and recovery available to me. I thought all there was was maybe sobriety. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:21:05 And that's really the pitfall. Right. Especially as a, a church leader, you get so much in that effort of, well, let's just get the behavior under control. Right. And then, then we'll worry about the healing or Right. Or once the behavior's going, like your bishop said earlier, that's the, that's doing the, the hurting. So be

Speaker 4 00:21:19 Clean for a month, be clean for three months, and then we'll go. But you've never resolved the wounds and the hurting that was underneath in the first place. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> my shame was never addressed. My fears were never addressed. All these years. I'm 62 now, and I'm still just a little boy that wants to be loved. Yeah. I wanted some control. I wanted some love. I wanted, I wanted to be accepted. And porn, any addiction gives you a certain amount of control, a certain amount. You know, if I'm depressed, I can elevate my mood. If, if my mood, if I'm too high, you know, high in a mood, I can suppress my mood. You know, addiction does that for you. We do addictions because for a very short period of time, they work. And

Speaker 1 00:21:58 You don't have to look at the, the wounding that's happened in your life, this virtual wounding or the hurt. Right. When you can just control that and numb out. Right. That's right. That's whether, whether that numbing means bringing you up or whether the numb numbing means bring you down. Right.

Speaker 4 00:22:09 Right, right. And every time you do it, of course, then you're creating new wounds for yourself. Mm. And you're creating new guilt and new shame and, and it just keeps kind of going.

Speaker 1 00:22:18 So, and this, I mean, you talked, you mentioned before, you recorded the, the 38 year journey. I mean, is that, I mean, just sort of this cycle, whether sometimes it was a really short cycle, maybe other times it was a longer cycle, but nonetheless, the cycle was happening for those 30 years. It

Speaker 4 00:22:32 Was always there. Yeah. It was always there. If you'd, if you'd offered me a thousand dollars to abstain for X period of time, I probably would've failed the day before or whatever. Because deadlines, pressures, you know, those are all artificial things. They have nothing to do with healing and recovery. They only have to do with artificial sobriety. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And not doing it is not the same as being healed and being in recovery.

Speaker 1 00:22:57 So at what point did you, and may, I don't know if this is the next sort of step in your recovery, but when did you turn to the 12 steps? Because I don't know, at that time, was the church, did the church have their formal 12 step program?

Speaker 4 00:23:08 They had, they had just started it about 15, 16 years ago from now. I kind of hit a rock bottom. I was in a community play, and I had to kiss his girl on stage, and I started kissing her off stage, trying to figure out what would be the next step. How do I, how do I pursue that? Yeah. And then about the same time, three o'clock in the morning, one morning my wife came down to the basement, you know, we had a two story house plus a basement. And she made her way down to the basement about three in the morning and caught me on the

computer looking at porn. And, um, she said, if I had a baseball bat right now, you'd be dead. And she made me call mistake president the next morning. We were pretty good friends with him. He was an ex-Marine colonel. And my priesthood leader said,

Speaker 1 00:23:50 There's a fun guy to call. Right. <laugh>. Yeah.

Speaker 4 00:23:53 He said, damn you, Mike Houghtaling, you're gonna ruin a perfectly good family. I'm too mad to talk to you right now. Click. So that was the love I got from my first priesthood call <laugh>. And then that was a Saturday. And then the next day Sunday, I went and talked to my bishop and I

Speaker 1 00:24:10 <laugh>. So at this point, what makes this rock bottom? Because your, your wife had caught you before, right? Oh,

Speaker 4 00:24:15 Yes. Not in the act, but, okay. But she had, yes, but she, she found evidence of it before, and I had confessed over time to her before what made a rock bottom is I realized that she said that God woke her up and said, go check on Mike. That seemed terribly unfair to me. I mean, it sounds ridiculous to say it that way. Yeah. But if God's on her side, how am I ever gonna be able to keep doing this? You know, <laugh>. Yeah. Because, 'cause the whole point is isolation and secrecy. And, you know, they say in AA that you're only as sick as your secrets. And obviously I would act out for a time and confess to her in a bishop and act out for a time and confess to her in a bishop and that kind of thing. So, but what made this different was I realized in the bottom of my very soul that I couldn't hide anymore. That if God's gonna wake her up at three o'clock in the morning, then maybe next time he'll wake her up at four o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the morning.

Speaker 1 00:25:08 The gig was up, it was

Speaker 4 00:25:09 The gig's over and there's no, there's no hiding anymore.

Speaker 1 00:25:12 And when you say rock bottom, was it just, uh, like then it was at like, well, then how will I numb out from these feelings? Or, oh, yeah.

Speaker 4 00:25:20 There's a lot of panic about that. Okay, now what do I do? That was how I coped. Now how do I cope? What do I do? And, and I was also frightened that I'd come so close to an affair, you know, and, and I was trying to figure out how does that work? I don't even know how to, how to start all that, you know? Yeah. But I guess I had started it, but,

Speaker 1 00:25:36 And at this time, when you say, you know, how do I cope? I mean, were you aware of some of these, uh, this, uh, trauma and w spiritual wounding and or that you've had, or like, not really. You didn't know what you were coping from?

Speaker 4 00:25:49 No. I just figured that I was evil and bad. And, and I, I, no, I didn't, I couldn't identify it.

Speaker 1 00:25:54 But you just knew, like, I just need this. I don't exactly know why. Right. But I've tried life not going to this. That's right. And, and it doesn't work for some

Speaker 4 00:26:01 Reason. Right? That's right. And for a short period of time, I can, I can stay away from it, but I have to have it

Speaker 1 00:26:05 Back. So the gig's up, you know, that this, that's not gonna be an option anymore. It's gonna be a lot more difficult. And so then you're thinking, I don't know why I need it, but I need it now. I don't know how I'm gonna get it.

Speaker 4 00:26:14 And how am I gonna get it? Well, when I go and talk to the bishop, he immediately release releases me. I was, I was the Gospel doctrine teacher of award. And I was a good teacher. I was a great teacher. And, and see, here's the funny part. I knew the whole time, I knew the gospel was true. And I knew that the church was the vehicle for bringing the gospel to people with ordinances and covenants and, and correct teachings. But I had come to believe that the gospel was true for you and you and you, and you and you. And there's like this big umbrella, I like to say it, where everybody that's protected by the atonement is sitting under the umbrella. But I'm way over there, and I'm so far away I can't even see the umbrella anymore. So I hope that it would work for my wife. I hope that it would work for my kids. I loved them dearly. I knew it was right. I knew it was true, but I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't live it. I'd tried, I'd failed. I'd spat on the savior too many times, and I, so I couldn't do it. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:27:12 So, man, how, I mean, <laugh>, so here we are at rock bottoms. Like, how long does this last? I mean, when did hope even begin to sparkle

Speaker 4 00:27:19 That day? The bishop said, there's a new thing in our stake. Would you do one thing for me? And I said, I'll, I'll try something for you, but not for me. But I'm, I can't do it. I don't care anymore. I mean, I care, but I can't do anything about it. I don't care. And he said, well, they've started a 12 step program. It's based on the steps of aa. It's called a RP. They meet Saturday over in the Noonan building at nine o'clock. Would you please just attend one meeting?

Speaker 1 00:27:44 And what year was this roughly?

Speaker 4 00:27:45 15 years ago. 14. Okay. 14, uh, 15 years ago. So do the math. 2007. I went public school. Yeah. Okay. So, so yeah. So about 2000, yeah, six or seven. Okay. And brand new a RP in our stake. So I agree to go and, but again, I said, I have no hope. I have no reason to believe it's gonna work, but I'll do it for you. So I show up Saturday morning, 10 to nine. Nobody comes. Not even the group leader.

Speaker 1 00:28:11 Like you were at the church building by yourself. Yeah, I'm

Speaker 4 00:28:13 At the, I'm at the church building. I'm sitting in the park lot. I'm waiting. That's

Speaker 1 00:28:16 Hopeful. That's great. I'm going,

Speaker 4 00:28:17 Well, dang. Okay. I guess it's not really a thing. But I, I'd agreed with him that I would go to one. So the next Saturday, I went back nine o'clock in the morning. It was just me and the group leader. And I don't even remember what step we were on. I, as I recall, it was eight or nine, you know, one of the more difficult steps maybe. But it didn't matter. I felt I'd lived in darkness so long and without hope for so long that the feeling, the best way I can describe it as though a spider were around the ceiling above me. And he was just dropping a tiny, tiny, tiny web of hope. And it just came down and it touched my leg. And so this tiniest connection to hope, I hadn't felt that in decades.

Speaker 1 00:28:59 And you knew it couldn't lift you, but it was hope still, you know, it was beginning,

Speaker 4 00:29:02 It was, it was hope. And it touched me. And so my heart was stirred. I knew there was something there. And so I began to take seriously a RP take seriously the 12 steps and do, as that counselor had recommended so many years ago, only two ways to get rid of an addiction. Either swap it for another or honestly work a 12 step program. So I began to work the program, and it probably took me a total of maybe, gosh, two years to actually achieve sobriety. Because in that process, I, I wasn't after sobriety. I, I was learning that what I was after was recovery and healing. And I knew it wouldn't be enough to just, uh, attend and underline some good things in the a RP book. But I began to really dig into 12 Steps in Recovery. I read the aa big book, the, the essay white book, the, you know, I, I read Tales, stories of other people who had been in addiction and got out. And

Speaker 1 00:29:56 I, and essay is Sex Sexual

Speaker 4 00:29:58 Sexaholics

Speaker 1 00:29:59 And Hogs. And I'm,

Speaker 4 00:30:00 Yeah, yeah, yeah. And got pretty regular with my a RP meetings and began doing the work. And, and I realized there was truth there. And, and I felt things that I hadn't felt for many, many years. But like I said, it was an instant. And, and that was frustrating. I mean, in the LDS culture, we, I repented, I'm done. I wanna move

Speaker 1 00:30:20 On. Yeah. I didn't wanna be with the other people under the umbrella. Right. That's

Speaker 4 00:30:23 Right. I wanna go get back to the umbrella. And, and I don't wanna stay here in, in trying to repent for very long. And that's what I see in the 12 steps now is a lot of people will come in and they'll dip their toe and then they'll go, okay, that's good. I got that. I understand that. And then they leave. And that's, that's not recovery.

Speaker 1 00:30:39 You know, it's, it's not necessarily a class. It's really a lifestyle. Right. Mean

Speaker 4 00:30:42 You shouldn't, it should never be called a class. It should be called a lifestyle. And it's not a 12 week program. It's not something you graduate from. It's a 12 step program. And if you do it right, it'll probably take you years to really work the program.

Speaker 1 00:30:55 Yeah. Yeah. Did you, uh, during this time, I mean, as you're sort of coming out and discovering this hope, were you receiving professional therapy in these, I mean, because

Speaker 4 00:31:04 I had some counseling from all these social services. Some of it was very valuable, some of it was less valuable. But part of that had to do with where I was at. One thing that I did notice during that time was all the attention was paid to me by the counselors and by the bishop. Not enough attention was paid to my wife, who really was the innocent victim in all this. So let's give Mike a blessing. Let's give Mike an interview. Let's see how Mike's doing. And that's one thing I, I counsel other leaders now to please pay attention to the spouses and to the children. They are truly the innocence. And in a real way, the victim, uh, the, excuse me, the addict is also an innocent victim of those wounds, et cetera. But, but we don't pay enough attention, I don't think, to the spouse.

Speaker 1 00:31:44 So what's the next step? What, you start the, start doing this years and years.

Speaker 4 00:31:49 Do the 12 steps? Uh, eventually, yeah. Uh, eventually got called as a group leader after I had about a year sobriety or, so I used to mark my sobriety in days and weeks. Did I tell you that already? Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:31:58 Not on the recording. So go for it.

Speaker 4 00:32:00 Okay. Yeah. You know, a 24 hour coin like they do in AA and a and a one week and a month, and a, you know, and I was buying myself these coins. 'cause we don't really have that tradition in the a RP world and, and a one year and then a two year coin. And, and they were valuable to me. They were important. But after several years, I quit carrying those coins. And all I carry now is a one day at a time coin. Because while I was trying to mark my progress, I realized that kind of like, stop doing it for 30 days and we'll ordain you a deacon. Stop doing it for 90 days and will ordain you an elder. I realized that marking time was less helpful than I wanted it to be. And that I was living in the future. Or when I get a year, I can do this.

Speaker 4 00:32:38 When I get get 10 years, I can do this. And in reality, what I needed was to stay sober today. And I tell you in those early days, you know, we talk about seeking recovery and healing and but white knuckling and some of those, some of those tools are still important. There were days when I would say, you know what, tomorrow I'm gonna look for the best and the greatest porn I've ever seen. Tomorrow I will do that. I will act out tomorrow. I'll start early in the morning and I'll go till late at night and I won't stop till I'm satisfied. But for today, for right now, just gonna hang on right now. And so it's not all, you know, puppies and, and rainbows. I'm in recovery and I'm learning new tools and I'm never tempted again. That's not how it was for

me. So you have to pick up every tool that you encounter along the way. If you listen to a podcast and some part of it applies, grab that. Put that tool in your, you know, that arrow in your quiver. That wasn't helpful to me. That part. Well, good. Great. Don't pick that up. But actually you probably should pick it up. 'cause you may end up using it later. Yeah. So every single tool along the way was helpful, including sometimes you just have to white knuckle through it. That is not a solution, but it's a tool.

Speaker 1 00:33:42 Yeah. I'm glad you mention that. 'cause sometimes we sort of dismiss the white knuckling and it's definitely not a long-term plan. Correct. Correct. It's, it's not gonna work. Correct. But, uh, there are those moments where you think, you know what, okay, I'll do that tomorrow, but today I'm not gonna do that.

Speaker 4 00:33:54 Exactly. And I literally said that to myself tomorrow. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:33:57 It's a tool, right. Not a strategy. That's

Speaker 4 00:33:59 Right. Yeah. That's right. There were some other strategies I learned along the way. Uh, one fellow teaches, face it, replace it. Connect where you, instead of, oh, cringing. When you see a, an billboard that's tempting or something, or a magazine article, that's a, a picture that's tempting. Instead of turning away and cringing, just face it. Recognize, oh man, she's beautiful. I'm attracted to that. And so you face it and you're not afraid of it. It has it, it loses some of its power over you. And then you replace it with truth. You know what, she's not mine. It's somebody's daughter, it's somebody's wife, it's somebody's sister, it's God's daughter. So I face it, instead of running from it, I replace it with truth. And then I connect, pick up the phone and call somebody. And we don't have to talk about my temptation. Hey Kurt, it's killing me. I'm dying. I just say, Hey Kurt, how was your fishing expedition this morning? Yeah. Just connect with somebody. Yeah. So that was a tool that I learned that helped me too. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:34:54 You know, that connection part. You know, we almost wanna just take those first two and say like, okay, I'll do those, but, 'cause I can do those on my own. And, uh, you know, but to reach out, like, that's hard. But man, when you do it, it's just, it's amazing how effective it's Right.

Speaker 4 00:35:08 It matters. And you don't have to reach out and connect necessarily over the temptation. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, I'm dying here. I just saw, you know, this and that. And, and I can't take it. We, I, I can just,

Speaker 1 00:35:18 And you might Right.

Speaker 4 00:35:18 And I might, I might. But what I really need to connect is just with another person and it takes me outta the place and it, you know. Right. And then of course there were tools, like avoiding places where I'd been to buy pornography or stolen it from, or whatever I'd done. You know, I mean, you just, you just can't go there. And so I, I had to change lots of things about me. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:35:36 Anything else as far as just the recovery process that brings you up to the point where maybe some leadership roles were starting to come into your life?

Speaker 4 00:35:43 No, that was kind of it. So now I've been serving in a ar uh, I attended a RP for a long time, served in a RP for a couple of years as a group leader and slash facilitator. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And, um, and then was really surprised after a couple of years of sobriety to get a, a phone call from the stake president. And he called me to be a counselor to my bishop in my home ward.

Speaker 1 00:36:03 Okay. And I would assume being a, a facilitator in the a RP program, he knew that he had some history there.

Speaker 4 00:36:08 He was the stake president that, uh, well, he, he replaced the ring colonel that damned me for ruining a perfectly good family. And I love him for that. I do, I do. But he replaced that stake president and he, yeah. He understood everything. And in fact, he's the one that had started the passage, pornography assistance, excuse me. Pornography Addiction Support group in our stake. Oh, okay. And put me as the first group leader over that instead of just a regular a RP. So, so I'd been serving under him for years. He was fully aware of my past and, uh, that I had, uh, at this point, probably three or four years.

Speaker 1 00:36:41 So give us a brief explanation how that worked and how it differed from a traditional a RP program.

Speaker 4 00:36:45 Traditional a RP group, addiction Recovery Program group will handle all addictions, any and all, doesn't matter what. It's okay. And it's open to males and females too. A passage, PASG, pornography Addiction Support Group is organized strictly for, in our case, men who suffer from pornography addiction. Okay. The guidelines are, as I understand, and where there's a passage group, then there's supposed to be a wives support group too.

Speaker 1 00:37:10 And is this coming from the churches program? Or is this just

Speaker 4 00:37:13 Yes, it is. Yes it is. And where there's higher, you know, higher density of Mormons, then there are some women's passage groups too. But in our stake, we had a men's passage group. Okay. Men only and, uh, all porn or sex addicts. And then a wom, a spouses support group, which my wife continues to lead the women's support group to this day.

Speaker 1 00:37:32 Oh, cool. And then in conjunction, there's also just the, the general a RP meeting. That's right. That's happening outside of those

Speaker 4 00:37:38 That's right. In our stake, we have two general a RP meetings, one passage for men and one spouse support group. And

Speaker 1 00:37:44 So if a leader wants to know more about how these passage groups work, they can go to the literature in a RP or,

Speaker 4 00:37:50 Yes. I jokingly tell everybody to go online and search for pornography <laugh>. And, and what I mean by that is go to church of jesus christ.org and search for pornography. And one of the links there will be in, uh, Provident Living and, and, um, as it's organized, and they can find their groups. Awesome.

Speaker 1 00:38:07 Awesome. So then you're called into a bishopric

Speaker 4 00:38:10 Called into a bishopric.

Speaker 1 00:38:11 And this is what, early 2000 tens or,

Speaker 4 00:38:13 Uh, yeah, yeah, about that. And, uh, it was kind of funny because the high counselor that called me was new and, and I said, uh, who am I gonna be serving with? He says, I don't know if I can tell you that or not. 'cause we were getting a new bishop. Oh, gotcha. So for three weeks, I had no idea. I said, yes, but I had no idea who the new bishop would be. <laugh> a great man, uh, who also was already aware of my story. By this time, Andrea and I were starting to talk and be a little more public. We both, we'd been in a RP passage in the spouse group.

Speaker 1 00:38:44 Like were you speaking in church or, we were,

Speaker 4 00:38:46 We were

Speaker 1 00:38:46 Starting to at Sunday school or

Speaker 4 00:38:48 Starting to, starting to be asked to speak in like what was then the third hour meetings, uh, fifth Sunday meetings, gave a couple of fireside, I did some youth only things all at the invitation of the bishops or stake President. And so we were beginning to be pretty open about our story. Initially, they would ask me to come and speak and tell my story. And then a smart bishop, like we were talking, said, Hey, Andrea has a story too, and I'd like our women to hear it. You think she'd be willing? Oh, I know she would. And so, so we began to tell our story. And so this was, this was, this was getting pretty public. And after serving a couple years in, uh, the Bishopric, then we were called for two years to a Spanish branch to serve in a Spanish branch. Then I was called to in the

Speaker 1 00:39:31 Bishopric

Speaker 4 00:39:31 Or just, uh, nope. I was the young men's president in the Spanish branch. And, uh, Andrew served in primary. And from there, then I was called to the high council. And, uh, one of my duties in the high council was to oversee the A RP program, which, good. That's my favorite thing. Yeah. A RP meetings are the most honest places that I've ever been anywhere in the church, you know, or out. So I counselor several years over the a RP program, and then about a year ago, get a call again from the Shaik president and asking me and Andrea to come in and, and he calls me to be the new bishop of the young single adult ward. Hmm. And so, one of the first things we did, and I love these kids, but one of the first things we did was organize, this is in Covid, this is in June of Covid Uhhuh

Speaker 1 00:40:17 <affirmative>, when you were

Speaker 4 00:40:17 Called of, of 20 Covid. Yeah, yeah. <laugh>. So, uh, yeah, so called last June, uh, 2020. And,

Speaker 1 00:40:23 And let ask, like during that call in extension of it, was there any talk about, you know, to encourage you to be open about your past or not, or

Speaker 4 00:40:33 Not specific direction to do that, but this stake president, which is now, you know, two away from the Marine, this stake president also knew because I was on high council. So he is my stake president there. And he had facilitated training for me to come and talk to the bishop for my wife to come and talk to the bishops, and encouraged me to go to the wards. So nothing explicit about the whole reason I'm calling you is 'cause I want you to share your story with the kids in the YSA ward. But he knew that that would happen. And he's super, super supportive, very loving. And he, he gets it, he gets addiction, he gets a OP and all three of 'em did. Really?

Speaker 1 00:41:07 Yeah. So starting that, I mean, uh, how do you begin to create a dialogue around that? Or, I mean, is it fifth Sunday type of lesson or? Well, we

Speaker 4 00:41:16 Just, a few days after I was called then we set a fireside. I wanted to still catch the summer kids before they went off to school. Mm. And so the format was, uh, me telling the kids my story, and I put up on the screen a, a picture of a, you know, a crack addict unrecognizable with scars and missing teeth. And, and I said, that's what you think of when you think of a crack addict. But, and then I put this picture of me 10 years old in a Cub Scout uniform. I said, I want you to know that this is what an addict looks like. And so I told my story almost

Speaker 1 00:41:55 Just like, just like you've told it, almost

Speaker 4 00:41:57 Almost word for word. Like I've told it to you. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, this is where I, you know, like this a NAA what was it? Like, what happened? What's it like now? And over the years, I'd say I've attended many AA and NA meetings also. I heartily endorse them. They are wonderful.

Speaker 1 00:42:13 And a alcohol's anonymous. And

Speaker 4 00:42:15 Narcotics. Narcotics. Anonymous.

Speaker 1 00:42:15 Anonymous. And, and so you tend them as sort of finding strength

Speaker 4 00:42:18 And you usually have a friend there. Yeah. Usually have a friend going there. I'm not like a regular attender. And, and drugs and alcohol, thank heavens have not been my issue. Yeah. But they are for many people and for, for several friends. And so I've attended with them. Yeah. That, that's what I'm talking about, the consequences. Right. The addiction's the same, the core problem is the same. And the resolution, the healing is the same. But had I

chosen a different addiction, I could be dead now. Yeah. You know, the path, I don't know would've happened.

Speaker 1 00:42:47 So you do this, uh, fireside and, uh, what's the, what's the response to it or

Speaker 4 00:42:52 It was, they loved it. They loved getting to know their bishop better. They loved get fi having a bishop they could trust.

Speaker 1 00:42:59 And what do you mean by that? Trust?

Speaker 4 00:43:01 Well, when I listen to general conference, every once in a while, somebody will come and talk about how he never heard his father speak an ill word to his, their mother or, or they never was a raised voice in their house. And I'm going, I don't even know what you're talking about. Yeah. You know,

Speaker 1 00:43:13 You just

Speaker 4 00:43:14 Don't relate to it. You're untouchable, you're unrelatable to me. And my whole point of telling the kids my story, and they, they say it's okay to call my kids. 'cause some of them could be my grandkids, age wise, <laugh>. So no disrespect to my young single adults, but my kids. So by telling 'em my story, it wasn't to call attention to myself or say, you know, Hey, I was so bad and now I'm so good. It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with, I'm not afraid of you. I'm not afraid of where you've been. I'm not afraid of what you've done. I love you. More important than that, God loves you. And then I've, I've done worked really hard to teach him what I, I would call sort of this bootcamp message about how God's love is. You know, we create false gods God who judges me and checklists me and punishes me, and is just waiting for me to do something wrong.

Speaker 4 00:43:57 And, and it's by grace we're saved after all we can do. I believe Stephen Robinson's explanation of what that means, after all, we can do so. The atonement, God's love is not a reward for doing something good. It's not that, you know, the cherry on top of the Sunday, as Robinson says, it's everything. It's everything. He's not waiting for me to meet him halfway. It's, he's not waiting for me to do my part. His love is there. And what changes isn't his love for me as we know, but my ability to respond to his love, my ability to accept his love.

Speaker 1 00:44:34 What advice would you give to a new bishop who maybe doesn't have that history but he, that he wants to gain the same level of trust that, uh, maybe you've been able to gain? What, how, how would you coach them through creating that same dynamic?

Speaker 4 00:44:44 I would hope that their, uh, water stake has, uh, has an a RP group. I would invite them to attend. I would invite, you know, when you look, go to an a RP group and you go, oh, there's six people here. You're going, oh, this is good. We've got the only six people in the entire stake that have a pornography problem all together. And I'm glad everybody else is safe. You know, <laugh>. Right. So that's not true. But as a bishop, they will have access to people with addictions. Take them to an A RP meeting, attend an AA meeting with them. And

when you go lose the tie and, and just be cur, don't be Bishop Francom. Yeah. Just, just go and, and try to understand, like I did early in my recovery. I read 20 books about, or buy people who were addicted or about addictions. And you'll begin to understand and see the patterns. You don't have to live it to understand it, I don't think. But you do have to try. You do have to want to understand.

Speaker 1 00:45:36 Yeah. I think just like taking the steps of at least trying to engage in that dialogue, whether it's, uh, even if you mess up, it's like, you know, all right, that didn't go well. I'm gonna try again and we'll regroup here and Right. And try again. And invite maybe a speaker to come. Or

Speaker 4 00:45:51 Have you ever had a friend with a parent or a spouse or something pass away? Yeah. And you say something stupid. Oh, I'm I'm, uh, you know, and then you go, oh, I didn't say that. Right. Well, I'll never say anything ever again to somebody who has a loved one pass away. No, that's not the way you do it. You just keep trying and you keep showing them that you're present, that you're there, that you care, and that whatever it is, we can work through this. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:46:12 Yeah. That's awesome. Um, and then just the, I mean, the response, did you feel like your schedule filled up as, as a bishop or, uh,

Speaker 4 00:46:20 Some, yeah. Some, uh, there's, there's still some people out there that think that I'm not talking to them or about them or, or that God's help isn't available for them. Uh, still a lot of fear around opening up and being honest. Um, but yes, yes. Yeah, I've had a great, and, and I've had, again, it's not about me, but I've had a couple of people say, sure. I'm glad you're my bishop. I sure, I'm glad you get this. I'm glad you've walked this path and recognized some of the, some of the Yeah. Stones along the way.

Speaker 1 00:46:50 I'm glad you say that. You know, it's not about me. 'cause it, it would probably be really easy to make it about you 'cause it's your story, you know, but it's more of like articulate it in the frame of, this is my inter, this is my interaction with the divine or with with Christ, and this is what he did for me. And why don't you come to

Speaker 4 00:47:07 My office? He'll do it for you. He'll do for you. Exactly. This was my interaction. This is how he changed my heart. Yeah. This is how he helped me heal and recover. And through healing and recovery, I eventually chief sobriety over 14 years now. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But I don't carry a 14 year coin. Yeah. <laugh>. And he will change your heart too. Yeah. You are not beyond his help. Yeah. You are not beyond his reach.

Speaker 1 00:47:29 Yeah. That's awesome. Does anything scare you like being a bishop with, with your story? I mean, do you, do you, the only thing say guess yourself or do, are do you worry about relapse? I mean, any of that?

Speaker 4 00:47:39 I literally still live one day at a time. Yeah. I feel like almo where he said that he could remember the pain of his sins no more. I still remember my sins, but the pain part is gone. And you remember when the, when the Lamanites had, were pounding on the knee

fights and God made the knee fights burdens light. Mm. Yeah. But he did not remove them. So I understand that I could fall again tomorrow. I understand that. I don't fear that because, um, I have a lot of tools to help me cope with it. Now, my biggest fear as a bishop is blowing it with these kids. But see, that's pride based too. Because it's not about me, it's about the savior. And so if I can just keep pointing them that way, just keep pointing them that way. That's the whole purpose of sharing, you know, heard this saying it, it's not helpful to share, to compare wounds most of the time. It sometimes is helpful to share wounds. So not comparing 'em, but sharing them sometimes. And for them to know that, you know, it can, there's a place to go. Yeah. There's a place to find healing.

Speaker 1 00:48:45 Yeah. So true. What would you say to maybe some stake presence listening that, uh, well, let, let me back up. And I remember as a bishop, I, I'd have this, uh, this exercise I went through, I'd call it the dark horse candidate, where maybe we, we were, as a bishopric, we were together trying to think of names or individuals to call to different positions. And sometimes they were, you know, suggesting a name as an elcor president, the stake president or whatever. Right. And I'd often turn to my Bishopric and saying, okay, I need a dark horse candidate. Like, who is just, that's crazy idea, right? Because I think there's this principle of like, you sort of have to like, push against revelation in order for it to push back. So I'm gonna say, I'm, I'm gonna, what do you think about this? God, you know, what about is, is this crazy enough that sometimes you would come back and be like, I'm glad you asked because I know you wouldn't have picked that person. But I think that's a good idea. And then I really

Speaker 4 00:49:35 Like that, Kurt,

Speaker 1 00:49:36 Some beautiful things happen. So what would you say to stake presidents who maybe leave some of these individuals off the list because they have that history?

Speaker 4 00:49:43 Well, I really like the way you phrased that because God's gonna respond to what you take to God. It's rare that he says, thou shalt call this man or this woman, but he's gonna respond to the candidates that you provide to him. Uh, normally, so I would say to the stake president, take a chance. It's funny you think that, you know the history of him and him and him and you are disqualifying them because you think you know your history. Well, him and him and him and him over there maybe haven't just fully disclosed all of their history yet. Right. Right. And I would always take the honest guy who's come out and talked about it over the guy that has not been able to confront it himself, because there's more out there than we know.

Speaker 1 00:50:25 Yeah. And that's, uh, breaks my, I know that there are probably bishops out there, relief site presidents, individuals who are struggling with shame filled, you know, transgressions that they don't know what to do with. And so they sort of put on that pose or that facade as they just say, well, I'm just gonna carry on and maybe I'm

Speaker 4 00:50:42 Gonna keep trying. I'm gonna, I'm gonna keep trying. And that's not an evil intent. Right. It's just that we don't know. Another way to carry on, I told you about my quilt

idea that, that I lived my life as with all these beautiful squares to my quilt. But there was just this one inky black tarry filthy square on my quilt. And as long as I kept it in the shadows, then I could live in this big, beautiful, bright colored, wonderful quilt. And then when I hit rock bottom, then somebody put my quilt in the washer and all that ink contar. Yeah. Contaminated the whole thing. And the savior gave me a new quilt.

Speaker 1 00:51:14 Yeah. And, uh, a few thoughts come to mind. Just the exercise of like, you know, yeah, maybe, maybe you don't wanna roll the dice on this individual 'cause you're not sure about his history. Then well call him up, take him out to lunch and sit down and say, tell me the story. Tell me your story. Right. Yeah.

Speaker 4 00:51:29 It's

Speaker 1 00:51:29 Important. I mean, just sitting here talking with you and hearing you is like, I have no worry with, you know, Bishop Houghtaling, uh, you know, running the show here, and like you said, all of us could fall. Right. It can happen, but what a great experience. And then the trust you're able to build, how you leverage some of that history and the redemption you've, you've shared. So that's awesome. That's great. And, uh, and just the idea of recognizing these individuals who may have a history but have overcome it to some extent, through the grace of Jesus Christ. Like they're practiced in being open and saying like, maybe they'll be more likely to call up the steak bread and say, you know what? This week's a tough week. I have this history and I'm a little more, uh, vulnerable right now. Can I connect with you or I'm, I want you to know I'm connecting with others, or things like that. Right.

Speaker 4 00:52:12 Well, you know, the thing about a porn addiction too is that we directly associate it with a sex addiction. So we soon, if we assume if a person has looked at a playboy, then he's also had affairs or something like that. Yeah, yeah. You know, we go that way. Well, the person that cuts, are you gonna keep them from holding a calling, the person that pulls their hair out? Are you gonna keep them from holding a calling? The person that, um, has an anger issue that always has to be right. That, that gambles is that completely disqualifying them from serving anywhere. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so porn of addiction isn't about sex. There's lots of good people who have a lot to offer that are struggling and are overcoming. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:52:49 Yeah.

Speaker 4 00:52:49 Try 'em.

Speaker 1 00:52:50 All right. I'm turning my studio audience. Any questions I've missed or things I should ask or ask? Did we cover it? Do you still work the 12 step?

Speaker 4 00:52:59 I do. And, um, I've been to 12 step meetings with some of my people. I don't attend weekly, uh, but especially steps 10, 11 and 12, kind of the maintenance steps. I bought a couple of hundred one day at a time coins, and at that fireside, and the one we have the end of this month, the end of May. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. I will give a one Day at a Time coin to every single one of my ward members. That's cool. Telling them again, the story and reminding 'em, you only live the gospel one day at a time. You can only stay sober one day at a

time. You can only stay clean one day. Everything that is important to do in life can only be done one day at a time. You cannot re-litigate the past. You cannot predict, or, or, or Yes, we set goals, but you can't live in the future. You can only succeed today with God's help. Yeah. Today, one day at a time.

Speaker 1 00:53:46 And I love that. You know, going back to your umbrella analogy, that you saw it as an umbrella for everybody else, but then you discovered the umbrella was over you the whole time, and now you're extending that addiction or that brokenness umbrella to everybody, because we all need the savior. Exactly. We need to be under his umbrella. So here's your coin. Right.

Speaker 4 00:54:02 That's the whole thing. That's right. And so remember this. Yeah. And every time I get in my pocket, it rattles and I remember what I'm trying to do and why, and what the source of the power is. So,

Speaker 1 00:54:10 So where do you get one day at Coin

Speaker 4 00:54:11 Coins? Oh, well, uh, from recovery world.com. Nice.

Speaker 1 00:54:15 <laugh>. And you order 'em in bulk

Speaker 4 00:54:17 Then? I I get 'em about a hundred at a time. Yeah. Oh, that's cool.

Speaker 1 00:54:19 That's great. Any other questions I missed here? Come up here and talk to the mic. What you can tell who you are and where you're from, but you don't have to.

Speaker 5 00:54:28 Uh, Sean from Lehigh. Hi Sean. Uh, quick question. What would you say or advice would you give to friends, family, board members of those who are in the circle of a recovering addict?

Speaker 4 00:54:42 Oh, that is a great question. And really the bottom line is to love them and to continue to point them towards the savior. I realized as an addict that I was talking to my wife about somebody was bugging me, you know, is it in my addiction? Somebody was bugging me in the ward one day, and I said, I just, I don't understand why are they like that? And blah, blah, blah. And she says, you know what your problem is? She says, you don't love anybody because you don't love yourself. And I realized that that was eventually not, not immediately, but realized that that was the key. And so as I began to allow God's love to come to me, this is the order it happened for me, then I was able to eventually feel love back for God. And then the most incredible thing happened that I never thought would, I began to love myself, but only in that order.

Speaker 4 00:55:31 I could never love myself until I love God back. And I could never love him until I accepted his love for me. And then after I began to love myself, then I was able to begin to love God's other children. And so the answer to those that are in the circle of Living family and friend circle of those that are in addiction, is to continue loving them, to continue showing grace for them to continue to accept them, to continue to connect with them. They do

not need to be isolated. They don't need to be told it's wrong. They get that they don't need to be rejected. They need to be embraced, loved, accepted, held.

Speaker 1 00:56:11 Yeah. Any other questions?

Speaker 6 00:56:14 You mentioned that, uh, you, that bishops and, uh, you know, the leadership shouldn't forget about the victims, the true victims. Victims. What would you recommend, what suggestions would you recommend to really help those victims?

Speaker 4 00:56:30 Well, it should. And by victims, I'm talking about the spouse of the addict, right? Yeah. And remember that I believe that the addict himself or herself is a victim. Okay. But when we're talking about the spouse of the porn addict or the sex addict specifically, it starts with interviewing them, offering them blessings, checking in with them, making sure the relief society president's aware that they, I see you, I see you. Instead of, I'm gonna work on him, and I hope you're okay too. It just gets forgotten. Not that they're intentionally being ignored, but they are being ignored that that spouse. So it starts with frequent. If you're seeing the addict once a week, initially you should be seeing the spouse once a week, and you should talk to them separately and find out where their at and where their heart is and what their feelings are. And, uh, there should be a lot of dialogue between the priesthood leader and the spouse.

Speaker 1 00:57:23 And I, I remember from my experience as a bishop like that just how important that relationship was that I remember Phoenix is where I thought, okay, I need to reach out to the wife. But the wife was like, you know, going through, through all this betrayal trauma, I was like, okay, because of you husband, now I have to go talk with a bishop. I don't even know him. It's so awkward. The last thing I wanna do is walk in that office. And so I would feel like they would sort of be, I'm, I'm fine. I'm fine. Right? So sometimes it's a long haul. You sort of have to keep connecting and encouraging and building relationship there. Hopefully you have it, you're already doing that. So when these things blow up that those relationships

Speaker 4 00:57:54 Right. Some of these things come up as surprises, and maybe the bishop hasn't established a relationship with either one. Yeah, right. A deep relationship yet. The other thing is for the bishop or stake president to offer counseling services. Yeah,

Speaker 1 00:58:05 Right. Therapy's huge and all this. Yep.

Speaker 4 00:58:07 Yeah. It matters. It matters. 12 steps therapy

Speaker 1 00:58:10 And someone who's not just any therapist, but you know, really gets someone who's maybe has some experience with this type of situation,

Speaker 4 00:58:16 Betrayal, trauma, you mentioned that phrase is a real thing. It's real. And just like addiction is real. Yeah. And so, yeah, we need to, we need to be more aware of that, I believe. Nice.

Speaker 1 00:58:26 All right. I got one more question for you, Mike. Oh. Just reflecting back, you know, in your, in your experience as a leader, you know, obviously more formal leadership, but your experience being a leader in this addiction recovery world, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Speaker 4 00:58:42 Oh, that's important because as I've come to learn who he really is and not who I thought he and the father were, you know, Kurt, I'm not sure if that's the order. I'm not sure if being a leader helped me be a better follower. I think that learning to be a true follower of him is what has helped me to be, if I have any skills as a leader, I think that's what's helped me to be a good leader, understanding who he is. You know, Joseph Smith said, we have to know the true nature of God in order to have faith in him. And most of my life, I didn't understand who God was. I had a false God placed up there, and that's who I thought I worshiped and who was gonna punish me and who was after me. But entering recovery, finding healing has allowed me to be a better follower. And that has allowed me just sharing that testimony of who God is and who the savior is, has allowed me to be for 11 months a decent leader. I think

Speaker 1 00:59:39 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 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 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 Word Council or other leaders that you may know who would really appreciate the perspectives that we discussed. And I remind you once again to text the word lead to 4 7 4 7 4 7 in order to subscribe to the Leading Saints Weekly newsletter.