

Confessions of a Mormon bishop

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Editor's note: This content originally appeared on the author's blog, [Russ Hill Media](#). It has been posted here with the author's permission.

I pulled into my driveway at 12:30 this morning.

I sat in the car in front of our dark house for a few minutes. Everyone inside was asleep. The whole neighborhood was still. And yet my mind was racing. So many questions. So many emotions. Sadness. Hope. Inadequacy.

Welcome to the life of a Mormon bishop.

Like pastors, priests, and clergy in other religions, those of us asked to serve as a bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints spend hours behind closed doors meeting with people who allow us into the darkest corners of their lives.

They come to us for various reasons. Because of guilt. Because they have lost hope. Because they have been betrayed. Because they don't know

where else to go. Because they feel worthless. Because the person they are isn't the person they want to be. Because they have questions. Because they have doubts. Because they believe in a forgiving God yet feel disconnected from him.

They come and sit in front of me. Some hesitate. Take a deep breath. And grasp for courage to say out loud what they have been hiding inside for days, weeks, or years.

Others almost run in. They spill before I sit. They're anxious to clear their conscience or announce their doubts.

Each one is different. For hours every week I sit. And listen.

I did not ask for this opportunity. I never considered I might someday have an office in a church. I have no professional training for this position. I am not a scriptural scholar. I have not walked through vineyards with robe-wearing monks. And, if you're wondering about vows of celibacy let me introduce you to my four kids.

All I did was answer a phone call. Show up for a meeting. And nod when asked if I would serve.

I don't sometimes wonder why me. I always wonder why me.

And yet they come. Share their stories. And look to me for wisdom.

I'm not sure any of them have learned from me. But, I have learned so much in the hours I've sat in that office listening to them.

I have learned that we believe it is a strength to conceal weakness.

I have learned that it is easy to want others to overlook our flaws as we expect perfection in them.

I have learned that it is hardest to show compassion and grant forgiveness to those closest to us.

I have learned that while curiosity is a strength it can also be a curse.

I have learned that we are creatures of habit.

I have learned that faith is a muscle.

I have learned that it is far easier to deny deity than to deny desire.

I have learned the mystery surrounding death forces a consideration of spiritual matters.

I have learned that observance of the Sabbath recalibrates perspective and improves judgment.

I have learned that most of us bear scars from the failure, disappointment, and fear in our lives. And, we prefer to wear long sleeves.

I have learned that to deal with life's pain most of us choose one of the following: alcohol, drugs, pornography, or spirituality.

I have learned alcohol and drugs are the easiest path. As long as you're willing to never stop drinking, smoking or swallowing.

I have learned pornography is highly addictive and has nothing to do with sexual appetites and everything to do with escape. And that the habit is never overcome in isolation.

I have learned that we feel like a failure when we make mistakes even when we profess a belief that the purpose of this existence is to make and learn from them.

I have learned that forgiveness is the greatest gift we can offer someone. And ourselves.

I have learned that many know about Jesus Christ but more of us could make an effort to know him.

I have learned that the strongest among us are those with the cleanest mirrors.

I have learned that the sins of parents profoundly affect children. And are often repeated by them.

I have learned that affection from parents profoundly affects children.

I have learned that most communication between parents and children is what psychologists call "superficial." Strong relationships are built on the "validating" variety.

I have learned that children desperately desire parents who listen.

I have learned that churches are not museums or catwalks for perfected saints but rather labs for sinners.

I have learned that "tolerate" and "love" are two very different verbs despite what popular culture professes.

I have learned that there's more sadness in this world than I had realized.

I have learned there is more goodness in this world than I had realized.

I have learned that to be happy is a choice.

I have learned those preoccupied with serving others have less time to count their problems.

I have learned that a habit of one brief moment of spirituality a day can alter one's entire direction.

I have learned that we want God to grant us space to make decisions but step in to stop others, nature, mortality, or illness from hurting us or those we love.

I have learned those who have made more mistakes have a great gift. Empathy. Now to the matter of searching out someone who hungers for it.

Indeed, I have learned I have much to learn.

The names of those I meet with will never be known. Confidentiality demands I never disclose their stories.

But, late last night as I sat in my car on the driveway I decided I should compile a list of what the people I meet with are teaching me.

And, I wanted to share it.

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