



EPISODE 43

GUEST: DR. JEFF THOMPSON



“Before I Formed Thee in the Belly, I Knew Thee”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

followHIM: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Wednesday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions

How do you lead people who have the agency not to follow you? Dr. Jeff Thompson, inaugural director of BYU’s Sorensen Center for Moral and Ethical Leadership, joins Hank and John to explore Jeremiah’s 40 years of faithful service without success, and what his story teaches us about letting go of control, trusting the Lord, and leading through our own unique gifts.

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Biographical Information:



Jeff Thompson is the inaugural Director of Brigham Young University's Sorensen Center for Moral & Ethical Leadership and a professor of Organizational Behavior in BYU's Marriott School of Business, where he teaches in the Master of Public Administration program. His life's work is helping people become Christ-centered leaders who edify families, congregations, communities, organizations and society.

Jeff earned his bachelor's degree and MBA from BYU and his Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from the University of Minnesota. His award-winning research explores meaningful work, motivation, and how people experience their work as a "calling." He is the co-author, with Stuart Bunderson, of *The Zookeeper's Secret*, a practical Latter-day Saint guide to discovering your calling in life and your unique leadership gifts.

In his personal life, Jeff frequently performs in professional musical theatre, including productions at Utah's Hale Centre Theatre and The Ruth Theatre. He loves racquetball, history, genealogy, and travel. He and his wife, Aimee, have been married for 35 years, and are the proud parents of four children and four young grandchildren.

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Hank Smith:	00:00:00	Coming up in this episode on followHIM.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:00:03	I eventually did what Jeremiah taught. I turned to the Savior to ask him for help, to forgive myself, to forgive my kids, to just love them. This was a long path, Hank and John. I just remember feeling for years like the ability to let go of this hurt was just beyond my grasp.
Hank Smith:	00:00:31	Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my fishing co-host, John Bytheway. John, correct me if I'm wrong, but you were a fisherman at one point.
John Bytheway:	00:00:44	Oh, when I was a teenager, I used to love to go fishing. Hank, they call it fishing. They don't call it catching. Sometimes you go and you don't catch anything.
Hank Smith:	00:00:53	It's fishing. Yeah, it's fishing. John, it's actually a spiritual metaphor in the book of Jeremiah for a missionary. The Lord calls missionaries fishers and hunters. Fishers and hunters. Now, do you feel like your mission in the Philippines was more of a fishing mission where you had a lot of people or a hunting mission where you were searching for one?
John Bytheway:	00:01:16	Well, I feel like the Philippines was a fishing mission. You could throw your net over the side type of a thing. And if you look at the growth of the church in the Philippines, when I was there, there were four missions and now there's more than 22, I think. My son went to Iceland, so I wrote him a letter and I shared with him Jeremiah 16:16 about hunters and fishers and how, for you, it might be more of hunting, but the Lord sent you.
Hank Smith:	00:01:41	John, we are privileged today. I can't tell you how privileged we are to have with us Dr. Jeff Thompson. It is Dr. Thompson, but can we call you Jeff?
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:01:51	Yes, please call me Jeff.

Hank Smith:	00:01:52	Welcome, Jeff, to followHIM.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:01:55	Thank you. It's such a pleasure to be here. I'm really excited.
Hank Smith:	00:01:58	Now, Jeff and I have been talking about this for a long time. I think this is going to be a superb day. Now, John, we just talked about Jeremiah, so tell me what else has been on your mind as we've been approaching this book.
John Bytheway:	00:02:10	I was reading some of the early chapters of Jeremiah, and I thought how would you like to hear this? They will fight against you, but they will not prevail against you. So you know, this is going to be tough. Maybe not the best two years for Jeremiah. A lot longer than two years. He didn't want to be called like Enoch and like Moses, he says at the beginning, I cannot speak. I am a child. I can't do this.
Hank Smith:	00:02:37	Don't, don't do this. Yeah. Jeff, you've been prepping for Jeremiah for a while, and even before we hit record, you were telling us what's happened to you as you've prepared. What are you looking forward to today?
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:02:50	You know, it's interesting that you start with the analogy of fishers because Jeremiah was definitely a fisher and not a catcher. His legacy was not a legacy of success. It wasn't the best two years. It was the toughest 40 years for Jeremiah. The question that has driven me the most is how can we lead God's children when they have the agency not to follow? Another way to ask that is, how can we let go of the illusion of control as we're trying to lead or influence other people? Man, it really is an illusion. God does not lead through controlling us, and yet we have a tendency to want to ensure that we get the outcomes that we want. Jeremiah is such a great example of learning to lead without control.
Hank Smith:	00:03:39	Hmm. This is going to be fantastic. Now, Jeff is a well-known name at BYU, but John, someone might not spend every day at BYU, like Jeff and I do. Tell us all about Jeff. What do we know?
John Bytheway:	00:03:51	Jeff Thompson is the inaugural director of the Brigham Young University's, listen to this name, Sorensen Center for Moral and Ethical Leadership . And it's David and Verla Sorensen that if you listen to the podcast, you hear those names every time. He's a professor of organizational behavior in BYU's Marriott School of Business where he teaches Master of Public Administration Program. His life's work is helping people become Christ-centered leaders who edify families, congregations,

communities, organizations, and society. Jeff earned his bachelor's degree and MBA from BYU and a PhD in organizational behavior from the University of Minnesota. His award-winning research explores meaningful work, motivation, and how people experience their work as a calling. I love this book title. Here it comes. He's the co-author with Stuart Bunderson of [The Zookeeper's Secret](#). I mean, I'm so intrigued, A Practical Latter-day Saint Guide to Discovering Your Calling in Life and Your Unique Leadership Gifts.

00:04:57 Hank, you probably felt like a zookeeper as a dad. I know how you have. This is a fun part. Jeff frequently performs in professional musical theater, including productions at Utah's [Hale Center Theater](#) and [the Ruth Theater](#). He loves racquetball, history, genealogy, and travel. He and his wife, Amy, I'm just impressed with all the stuff you do, have been married for 35 years, are the proud parents of four children and four young grandchildren. I have to ask, because my wife is a big fan of the Hale Center Theater, about your most recent work there.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:05:35 I really had such a remarkable experience. We closed a show about a month ago. It's a new musical called [Harmony](#). It's unusual for someone of my demographic to have the opportunity to play a lead role in a musical. It's the story, a true story of a six-man singing group called The Comedian Harmonists who performed in pre-World War II Germany. They were remarkable. They made 12 movies. They went on world tours. They were really household names in their day. In fact, President Uchdorf attended one of the performances and said he grew up listening to the music of this group. Three of those men were Jewish. As Hitler came into power, they were essentially erased, and so their story has been lost to history, but revived in this incredible musical, and I had the privilege of playing the oldest surviving member of that group, to narrate the story and to bring it to life. It was just a pinnacle experience. I love what theater can do in telling true stories and teaching true principles. It's been such a blessing.

John Bytheway: 00:06:40 That probably means you are a singer, doesn't it?

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:06:43 I do sing, yes.

Hank Smith: 00:06:45 I bet you sing well. To get a lead at the Hale, John.

John Bytheway: 00:06:49 I know.

Hank Smith: 00:06:49 That's not a small thing.

John Bytheway:	00:06:52	I couldn't sweep the floors there, but you got a lead.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:06:55	I'll tell you, no one was more surprised than me. It's been such a joy. I feel really blessed.
John Bytheway:	00:07:02	That's great. Well, we're blessed to have you here, Jeff. Welcome to followHIM.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:07:07	Thank you.
Hank Smith:	00:07:09	And if there's anybody listening from the Hale who can get John and I tickets, well, we would love to.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:07:16	I'll try to set you up.
Hank Smith:	00:07:17	My good friends, Scott and Karen Smith had a lot to do with building the Ruth here in Utah County. It is such a blessing as well. I love that both of those are offered, The Hale and the Ruth. Jeff, John and I will want to be front row on the next show. We'll bring our styrofoam fingers. Go, Jeff.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:07:40	I might teach you some theater etiquette before I invite you.
Hank Smith:	00:07:43	Oh okay. That might be helpful.
John Bytheway:	00:07:45	We go often and my nephew will be the pharaoh in the Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:07:52	Oh, fantastic.
John Bytheway:	00:07:53	Shout out to Bryan Hague. He's quite a talented kid and I'm excited to watch him there. So we'll be there.
Hank Smith:	00:08:00	All right. I'm going to amend my statement. If there's anybody at the Hale who has tickets, send them to me. Apparently John gets to go all the time. Let's get started in the Come, Follow Me manual. The lesson this week, Before I Formed Thee In The Belly, I Knew Thee. At first, Jeremiah didn't think he would make a good prophet. Behold, I cannot speak, he protested, but the Lord reassured him, I have put my words in thy mouth. Jeremiah felt he was an inexperienced child, but the Lord explained that he was actually more prepared than he realized. He had been ordained to this calling even before he was born. Jeremiah set aside his fears and accepted the call. He warned Jerusalem's kings and priests that their pretended holiness would not save them. The child who thought he could not speak

came to feel God's word in his heart as a burning fire and could not be silent.

00:08:53 Jeremiah's story is also your story. God knew you, too, before you were born and prepared for your mission in life. Among other things, that mission includes something Jeremiah foresaw, gathering God's people one by one to bring them to Zion. Even if you don't know exactly what to do or say, you can be not afraid, for I am with thee, saith the Lord. Wow. I can feel the passion there, and I know Jeff is passionate about this lesson. Jeff, John and I are ready to learn from you.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:09:24 Oh, thank you. Well, I have to tell you, when I first received this assignment, I'm keenly aware that I am not a scholar of the scriptures, definitely not of Jeremiah. So the first thing I did was I went to the BYU Library and I checked out the thickest books I could find and started reading about Jeremiah's history. And that was fun and that was interesting, but what really changed for me is when I started reading the book of Jeremiah itself. As I dug into Jeremiah's words and his experiences, I was so captivated. This is a relatable prophet. This is someone who went through so much turmoil and adversity for 40 years, and as I read him, I thought, I love all of these scholarly books. I just want to connect with this man, and I would love to share with your listeners what it must be like to be so committed to serving the Lord that you're willing to undergo decades of mockery, persecution, failure.

00:10:30 By any measure that we might use for a leader today, you would have to consider Jeremiah a failure. He didn't convert people. We don't have statistics that say, here's what happened in Judah because of all of his great efforts. This is a man who served without external results to validate his efforts. Oh, man, you just feel for him.

John Bytheway: 00:10:58 The fact that you got the most from just going to the text, I love backstory and I love all that stuff. What's the history and what's going on, but connecting with the actual text, I just think that's where you're most likely to have the Spirit of the Lord touch your heart and teach you something. I love how he's a relatable prophet. You read this and you go, wow, how sad. That reminds me of my life.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:11:24 He's relatable too. As we think about our own attempts at leadership, as we talk about leadership, it's something I think a lot about as the director of the Sorensen Center. We tend to attribute leadership to people who have a title, to people who are maybe dynamic orators. Sometimes we don't see ourselves

as a leader, but if we think about what it means to be a saint and to be contributing to the building of Zion, leadership is really about any positive influence that we have or that we try to have in our lives. Parents are leaders. Ministers are leaders. As friends, we lead through our positive influence. It's hard sometimes to give ourselves credit for the potential we have, to have a positive influence when we don't have that title or that notoriety.

Hank Smith: 00:12:20

That's right on. And why is that, Jeff? I mean, you study leadership. We'll occasionally have someone write into the show saying, I wish you would have someone normal. Right?

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:12:31

I really want to say, look, all of these people that we have on are normal. They're living life just like everybody else, yet somehow we think if I'm visible, I'm a leader. Brigham Young said that is the duty of a saint of God to gain as much positive influence as they can and to use every particle of that influence to do good. To me, that's really a call for all of us to be leaders. So as we talk about Jeremiah today, I really do feel he's relatable, but you don't have to see yourself as someone of a prophetic level authority to glean the lessons that we can learn from him about leadership and to think about the way that you have a positive influence in your small sphere, in your life. One of the things I love about the Sorensen Center is our logo is very distinctive. It is just an image of a candle that is slightly tilted, a lit candle. We thought a lot about do we use an image of a sunburst because we knew we wanted to talk about light, but the image of a tilted candle suggests that we all have our bit of light that we can share, and as long as we're extending that small candle outward, we are engaged in the process of building the kingdom. We are leading in that way.

Hank Smith: 00:13:56

Here's some names, John, that have been supporters of both our show and the Sorensen Center at BYU. I bet you've probably never even heard some of these names because they are leaders who have so much influence, but they're not concerned with being visible. And I think that is such an admirable quality. Greg Sorensen, John Sorensen, Sheila Smith, she's a Sorensen, Kristen Sorensen, Paul Sorensen, Kathryn Olsen, who is also a Sorensen. They are so supportive of both Jeff's organization and our podcast, and they are not looking to be upfront. Yet, as Jeff said, they have incredible influence.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:14:40

The Sorensens are a remarkable example. We're so honored to have their name be the banner of our center. I've had a chance to meet all of the individuals you've just mentioned. They're remarkable. I think that really comes from Verla Sorensen and

her husband, Elder David E. Sorensen. I've had a chance to study his life, remarkable leader, not flashy, never sought the spotlight. But his accomplishments, not many people know this, but when President Hinckley announced the flooding of the earth with temples, it was Elder Sorensen that he turned to, to pull off the logistical feat of securing real estate and planning a remarkable world-changing event. He never stood up and took credit for that. How do we be more like that? I think we consecrate ourselves to God's kingdom and let everything else take care of itself. We're very honored and so blessed by the financial support and the moral support from the Sorensen family, truly, truly saints in every meaning of the word.

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| Hank Smith: | 00:15:46 | Yeah. When I think of Shannon and Steve and David and Verla and their children, it's true consecration. They take that covenant reverently, sincerely, internally, in every way. |
| John Bytheway: | 00:15:59 | I love that line. The Savior repeats about three times in the Sermon on the Mount, "The Lord which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." |
| Hank Smith: | 00:16:09 | Keep going, Jeff. Today's going to be like this. I better get my scriptures open and ready to take notes. |
| Dr. Jeff Thompson: | 00:16:15 | It's important to understand the context that we're looking at with Jeremiah here. He is living in an era of such political turmoil. He ministers to the kingdom of Judah. During the course of his ministry, which lasted 40 years, Judah is controlled by the Assyrians and then by the Egyptians and ultimately destroyed by the Babylonians. So he is watching all of this unfold. He sees the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple. He sees the people of Judah being dispersed and taken captive in Babylon. He is living in a time of such tumult that might remind some of our listeners of our day and some of the trials and tribulations that we face today. He's got a tough assignment just in terms of the times in which he lives. During this time, his call is to warn and to give Judah a chance to make different decisions so that this impending disaster doesn't happen, and he warns them, he pleads, he pronounces possible curses that could have come upon them. |
| | 00:17:35 | He gives his all in this endeavor to bless God's children in the kingdom of Judah, and it falls on deaf ears over and over again, constantly. You add to that, that the Lord in chapter 16 commands Jeremiah not to be married. So he's doing this as a solitary man, feeling like he has no partner and really no friends that he can trust. I love what we brought up earlier about his call. It's such incredible scripture. "Before I formed thee in the |

belly, I knew thee." What a remarkable affirmation to receive from the Lord. That would make me feel really good to hear God say that to me, but Jeremiah's reaction is, wait a minute. O Lord God behold, I cannot speak for I am a child. The Lord talks about identity and Jeremiah immediately goes to insecurity. Are you sure? Like are you sure, God, that I am up to this?

00:18:41 I am a child. We think Jeremiah was quite young. He may have been a teenager. He may have been in his early 20s. So when he says, "I am a child," he probably has reasons to be insecure. I think of how many times we receive an assignment and just think, this is bigger than me. I've had that experience numerous times in my life. Yeah. Well, God rushes in though to reassure Jeremiah in verse seven. He says, "Say not I am a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee." And then in verse eight, "Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee." We experience the same thing. If we will attend, if we will tune our ears to the Lord, he will rush in with those reassurances that we need.

John Bytheway: 00:19:30 I want to go through my entire standard works and find every time the Lord says, "I'm with you." He doesn't say, you're great, you're awesome, you're the best. He just says, it's okay, I'll be with you.

Hank Smith: 00:19:43 It's almost as if he agrees, right? He's like, yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:19:46 You have that exactly right. You're a child and you're afraid, but I'm with you. And that is the promise of the sacrament prayer at the end. Always have his Spirit to be with us.

Hank Smith: 00:19:57 It's almost as if the Lord says, yeah, I chose you so everyone would know it was me. So get on up there and give it a shot.

John Bytheway: 00:20:05 Love it.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:20:05 I would like to go back to that, that really remarkable statement before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee. That is definitely a statement of divine identity. I think we often talk about divine identity in the abstract. We are children of God, so we have infinite potential. That's absolutely true. But that's not all of the story here. He's not just saying, Jeremiah, you're my son. He's saying, Jeremiah, I know what you can do. I know what's special about you, what's unique about you. I know what your gifts are. Understanding our divine identity is not just embracing the remarkable truth that we can become like him, but there is something about our uniqueness. I've been paying attention to

what's unique about Jeremiah, and I think I've identified a few of his spiritual gifts. He is very expressive and emotional. I mean, in some cases, he's a bit of an emotional rollercoaster.

00:21:06 He uses the energy of his feeling to persuade, to convince. Since I come from this world as well, I have to say, Jeremiah is theatrical. This is a man who uses big gestures. He takes a piece of pottery and smashes it in front of the priest to make a point. We're not actually not going to read this for part of the assignment for Come, Follow Me, but at one point, he puts on a yoke, an oxen yoke, and walks around and preaches with that to say to people, it's time for you to be submissive. He is very sort of embodied in the way that he teaches and in a way that I don't think we always see with other prophets. And then the other thing I notice is he has a gift for metaphor. If you think about how many analogies he draws, he talks about pottery, partridges, boiling pots, fountains, cisterns, fishers, hunters, trees, snow.

00:22:02 It goes on. I mean, I can't even list all of the metaphors that he uses in his teaching. As we think about the ways that Jeremiah is unique, we can start to understand why God chose him from the womb, because he needed a prophet who was going to make a splash, to be able to make very strong statements and to do it in this very demonstrative way. God doesn't just love us because we're his children. That's definitely true. He's also made us unique. Part of leadership, part of leading effectively is connecting with that part of yourself that is most authentic. When we teach our students at the Sorensen Center about leadership, we are constantly emphasizing your call as a leader is not to become someone else who you aren't. It's not to adopt all of the traits of President Oaks. It's to be more you. Like the best leaders have a clear understanding of what's unique about them, what they can offer, what their gifts allow them to do. And I think one of the great struggles of leadership is coming to terms with what I uniquely have to offer and recognizing that what is most me is what is enough to lead.

Hank Smith: 00:23:27 Hmm. I'll just speak from my own experience. I think John has had this experience as well, but I definitely have, which is my personality does not fit in the church. I have a tendency to not be reverent. I'm the one that got shushed quite a bit throughout my primary years and oh, my poor primary teachers. I have had that thought before that I need to be something else. John, have you felt that way ever?

John Bytheway: 00:23:54 I think I've shared with you before, Hank, that when I was called to be a bishop that you mentioned, I've thought, now I've got to

fit into this bishop mold, and it took me a few weeks to go, wait a minute. The Lord called me so I can still be me.

- Hank Smith: 00:24:10 Let me read you something from [Patricia Holland](#). If you've never heard this, everyone listening, you are going to thank me forever for this. "Our Father in heaven needs us as we are, as we are growing to become. He has intentionally made us different from one another so that even with our imperfections, we can fulfill his purposes. My greatest misery comes when I feel I have to fit what others are doing or what I think others expect of me. I am most happy when I am comfortable being me and trying to do what my Father in heaven and I expect me to be. For many years, I tried to measure the oft times quiet, reflective, thoughtful Patricia Holland against the robust, bubbly, talkative, and energetic Jeff Holland and others with like qualities. I have learned through several fatiguing failures that you can't have joy being bubbly if you're not a bubbly person.
- 00:25:00 It is a contradiction in terms. I have given up seeing myself as a flawed person because my energy level is lower than Jeff's. I don't talk as much as he does, nor as fast. Giving this up has freed me to embrace and rejoice in my own manner and personality in the measure of my creation. Ironically, that has allowed me to admire and enjoy Jeff's qualities even more. Somewhere, somehow, the Lord helped me see that my personality was created to fit precisely the mission and talents he gave me. For example, the quieter, calmer talent of playing the piano reveals much about the real Patricia Holland. I would have never learned to play the piano if I hadn't enjoyed the long hours of solitude required for its development. This same principle applies to my love of writing, reading, meditation, and especially teaching and talking with my children.
- 00:25:53 Miraculously, I have found that I have untold abundant sources of energy to be myself. But the moment I indulge in imitation of my neighbor, I feel fractured and fatigued and find myself forever swimming upstream. When we frustrate God's plan for us, we deprive this world and God's kingdom of our unique contributions and a serious schism settles in our soul. God never gave us any task beyond our ability to accomplish it. We just have to be willing to do it our own way. We will always have enough resources for being who we are and what we can become.
- Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:26:30 Hank, thank you so much. I have not been aware of that quote, but Sister Holland there summarizes a whole stream of moral philosophy about what virtue ethics means, about how we have to be our unique selves to contribute what we have to the

world. And if I may take a stab, Hank, as I think about your perception that you don't fit within the church, my guess is that that younger you that got shushed a lot was probably a jovial kid who was maybe a little bit more focused on finding the humor than finding the soberness. I think about what you contribute now, the whole feel of followHIM reflects that spiritual gift that you have for joviality, and I think your voice matters a lot in the kingdom, even if sometimes it may not fit the normal stereotype. That's how spiritual gifts work. They contribute and add a richness.

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| Hank Smith: | 00:27:31 | Jeff, in your experience, how can we better allow people to be themselves? John, I would like to hear from you too. You're very accepting. If you want to be accepted for who you are, just hang out with John Bytheway for an hour. He'll love who you are, specifically who you are. I would love to hear from both of you. I think we can, sometimes, without meaning to, want to put a lid on what other people's personalities are, their gifts are, and say, no, no, no, that's not the way we do things. |
| John Bytheway: | 00:28:00 | Well, I love the statement that harmony is being different together. That should resonate with a musician, with a singer. Harmony's being different together. We're not unison. Unison's nice, but it's boring. We're not supposed to be unison. Every hymn we sing is, almost every one, some of them are in unison, but are saying, well, you can't sing that high. You sing down here, and it's going to be great, and you sing in this mid-range, and it's going to be great, and the product will be harmony. |
| Dr. Jeff Thompson: | 00:28:33 | That's ringing a bell for me because that was part of the message of the musical we were talking about earlier, is bringing together difference. The doctrine of spiritual gifts, and this doctrine is taught in almost every book of scripture. It is so important, and I fear that sometimes we don't give it enough emphasis, but we're taught that to each is given a spiritual gift severally, that the whole may be edified. And if we really believe that doctrine, then finding a saint who has a different view, a different style, a different approach is an opportunity for us to learn, to be enriched. Really, the definition of Zion is not we're all going to become like each other. Building Zion is a hard job, precisely because we're trying to make a whole out of many different parts. The work of Zion itself is not, let's all conform and make sure we're all dressing alike and looking alike and talking alike. It's the work of saying, we have room enough to love all people with their own style and their own voice who are uniting in following the Savior. That can be hard work, but it's such joyful work. It is so enriching when you can appreciate and |

embrace the types of various gifts that really compliment our own. I love that principle.

- Hank Smith: 00:30:01 I'm going to add one more witness from Patricia Holland's wonderful husband, [Jeffrey R. Holland](#), in April 2017. This talk is called Songs Sung and Unsung. He says, "When we disparage our own uniqueness or try to conform to a fictitious stereotype, stereotypes driven by an insatiable consumer culture and idealized beyond any possible realization by social media, we lose the richness of tone and timbre that God intended when he created a world of diversity. Now, this is not to say that everyone in this divine chorus can simply start shouting his or her own personal oratorio! Diversity is not cacophony and choirs do require discipline. But once we have accepted divinely revealed lyrics and harmonious orchestration composed before the world was," there's a little reference Jeremiah, "then our Heavenly Father delights to have us sing our own voice, not someone else's."
- 00:31:01 Believe in yourself, believe in him. Don't demean your worth or denigrate your contribution. Above all, don't abandon your role in the chorus. Why? Because you are unique, you are irreplaceable. The loss of even one voice diminishes every other singer in this great mortal choir of ours, including the loss of those who feel they are in the margins of society or the margins of the church."
- Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:31:25 I'm thinking of a student of mine that taught me such an important lesson about this, and I think we often shy away from our gifts because we feel they don't fit. This was a young man in my classroom who just oozed leadership potential. I could tell he had a strong voice and a clear sense of dynamism and people were drawn to him, but I watched him sit in the back of the classroom and just stay quiet. He didn't put himself out. He didn't speak up like he knew he could. And finally one day I pulled him aside and I said, hey, I'm wondering why you're shrinking. I think you have incredible potential. And he told me, he said, you have to know that as a young man, I grew up in the inner city and I was part of a gang. I perpetrated horrible acts on people as a gang member. I was violent. I beat people.
- 00:32:15 He says, I know my potential for exercising power and it terrifies me. So I have decided that I am going to mute that part of myself. I worked so hard to repent and get on my mission. I looked at this young man and my heart was just aching for him. I said, we need you. This gift that you have may have been distorted as a youth, but it is still something you have to offer. I want you to step forward and lead. And I watched him do that. I

watched him blossom and really come to be comfortable with his gift. It reminds me of [Marianne Williamson's](#) famous quote, "Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It's our light, not our darkness that frightens us." I experienced some of that myself too. We've talked about my involvement in theater.

00:33:05 I fought that for years because I thought, this is not what a BYU professor does. Being in a play, that's not a serious thing. It wouldn't leave me. I kept feeling compelled until finally in my mid-40s. I said, okay, let's give this a try. Let's see if this is something. And I cannot tell you how blessed I have been to learn how to tell stories on stage. It's a sacred thing for me and it's allowed me to make friends with people I never would have connected with in my normal BYU life. I would say to the listeners who are feeling like, oh, I'm different. I don't know if I fit here. You were known from the womb to have these gifts and they're implanted in you to shine, to bless God's kingdom. And there are ways that that's going to happen that you can't even imagine until you have the courage to share your gifts, to speak your voice. And I hope you're surrounded by saints who appreciate them. So let us all be those kinds of saints as well.

Hank Smith: 00:34:11 Two people come to mind. Jeff, have you ever looked up a YouTube video called [Be a Mr. Jensen](#)? It's about our friend Clint Pulver. John, you and I know Clint pretty well.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:34:22 I know Clint pretty well also.

Hank Smith: 00:34:23 He struggled as a little boy in elementary school. Everyone go look up that video, Be a Mr. Jensen. Also, another friend of ours, Jason Hewlett. Jason's humour is above and beyond. He is so talented. He has confided in me that there were times in his youth that leaders told him to change his personality, that it was not reverent or appropriate and it needed to go. Almost as if it was like a part of his personality was a sin. It took him a while to get past that. Now he has and he's done incredibly well, affecting millions of lives literally with his unique gifts. But perhaps as moms and dads, as church leaders, especially leaders of youth, we could just be a little bit more gentle and tender with, I don't want to come down hard on adults because it's hard. It's hard to be a youth leader. Sometimes they will not pay attention or they will not be quiet. I'm that kid. I know what that's like.

John Bytheway: 00:35:20 Hank, you don't have grandchildren yet, but I do, and their school years are coming up and I know them and I know their

personalities and I'm going to be praying for their teachers that they'll allow them to flourish in their quirks.

- Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:35:36 I'm thinking about what you said about not fitting in with the church and going back to Jeremiah, he most definitely did not fit in. As I described to you, he is an emotional person and that's probably a delicate way to put it. He is fiery. He's confrontational. He asks really hard questions. I think he was probably a handful as a young person, but we get an answer in Jeremiah chapter one of how we can bring our gifts into resonance with what those gifts need to do. It's verse nine. It says, "Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth and the Lord said unto me, behold, I have put my word in thy mouth." Now we know from the Book of Mormon what happens when God touches something, it emits light. We learned that from the brother of Jared. And I'm thinking about the unruliness of Jeremiah's personality being touched by the hand of God so that it emits light.
- 00:36:41 So as we bring our uniquenesses and our gifts and our quirks, we can allow the Lord to put his hand on us and make those things shine. As leaders of youth and as parents, we also need to recognize that the rough stones that we're looking at will eventually be touched by the Lord and the things that might annoy us a little bit could actually become strengths that the Lord allows to shine and to be a blessing.
- John Bytheway: 00:37:11 I just for a second want to go back to what Jeff said about Jeremiah 1:5, because I knew this reference before my mission, before Preach My Gospel, imagine those days. This was a place in the Bible that we could say, look, this mentions a premortal existence. Jeff, what you did, it doesn't end there. This is a Lord who knows you. This is what you were saying about Jeremiah. And I thought, oh, I need to think about that. This is a Lord that knows you better than you know yourself and sent you to this earth. What do we have in our memory? I just remember my mortal lifetime. I don't remember that part, but he does. Maybe because of that, I can trust him more when he puts me in a situation like Jeremiah where he says, I can't do this. And the Lord's, well, actually, you can. I know you and I'll be right here. I'm with you.
- Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:38:04 Because the Lord knows Jeremiah, knows him so well, he has a calling for him that is specific to Jeremiah. I have devoted a lot of my academic career to studying how people find their calling in life. The reason that I ended up becoming an expert on zookeepers was actually pretty personal. I worked in a corporation early in my career, and I'm not going to go into

detail other than to say it was a pretty miserable experience. I was in an environment that didn't suit me. I was involved in selling a product I didn't really believe in, and I just felt alienated and separate from my work, and it affected all parts of my life. I eventually decided to get a PhD to study how people find deep motivation in their work. That has been a joy for me. I get to study people whose eyes sparkle when they talk about the work they do.

00:39:01 Studying zookeepers came about because I was interested in finding people who didn't make a lot of money, who didn't have a lot of status or prestige, but who were really committed to their work, who had a sense of its importance. My coauthor Stewart Bunderson and I found that in the zookeeping profession, and we ended up interviewing dozens of zookeepers surveying thousands of zookeepers from across the country. What we found in talking to them is that finding a sense of calling in life really boils down to three things. It's having a clear understanding of your gifts and uniqueness. Zookeepers know that they are animal people. Number two, it boils down to having a clear purpose. Zookeepers know that they are working with species whose habitats are being threatened. They have a missionary zeal about the work that they do. And the third thing that we found was really surprising because it didn't sound academic, it sounded spiritual, but zookeepers, almost to a person, had a sense that they had been guided to the work that they were doing.

00:40:14 Zookeepers found great satisfaction when they knew that their gifts allowed them to serve someone or something in the place where God had brought them, but that doesn't mean that their work was fun every day. When we talk about finding a calling, we usually think of, oh, my work feels like play. Every day is a joy. It's euphoric. For zookeepers, it's not. It is backbreaking work. It's dangerous work. It's smelly work. You don't get paid very much. They suffer, they bleed, they cry for these animals. They're not happy in spite of that suffering. They're fulfilled precisely because they're willing to suffer for it. When we think about Jeremiah undertaking this calling from God, he has a unique gift that allows him to do it. He has a strong purpose that God has given him and he suffers through it. Man, in the future chapters here, we're going to see him suffer so much, but it's worth the suffering for him and it's his calling.

00:41:20 Meaningfulness doesn't come cheap, it doesn't come easy. We have to be willing to pay for it. And Jeremiah is such a stellar example of being willing to do what it takes to perform an

outstanding work with very little thanks and very little external success.

- Hank Smith: 00:41:39 John, Jeff didn't ask us to do this, but I'll just say it one more time. The Zookeeper's Secret, Finding Your Calling In Life. Jeff, I have had so much fun today. I've been so excited about everything you've taught. Let's keep going. What do you want to do next?
- Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:41:54 What I'd like to do next is talk about what kind of a leader does God call to accomplish what Jeremiah is supposed to accomplish. I'd like to turn here to some of the things I've learned through the Sorensen Center and our work there. I know your listeners on audio won't be able to see this, but there's a framework that we use called the [Christ Centered Leader Model](#), and it's really used throughout BYU to describe how the Savior leads. If you can't see the image, it's basically a circle, and at the center is a Christ-centred leader. On the outskirts of that circle, you have four relationships. A leader maintains a relationship with God, that's a covenant relationship. A leader maintains a relationship with self, understanding our gifts, which is something we've talked about. They also have to maintain relationship with God's children, the individuals who come in their lives, and with their stewardships, which are the larger responsibilities, maybe the organizational responsibilities they have.
- 00:43:00 So as we think about those four relationships, first of all, it's a lot to think about, to try to manage those, and there's some inherent tensions between those relationships. Obviously, the tension between God's children and stewardships is the tension between the 99 and the one. Often we're called to seek out the needs of an individual, but that can take time away from our stewardship. Balancing that is all really difficult for a leader to do. The magic of the model, the crux of it is at the center of the model. We have this golden ring on the inside that contains three principles that the Savior demonstrated consistently always in the way that he ministered to people. And the three principles, bedrock gospel doctrines, the Savior expressed love, he honored agency, and he invited accountability. Going forward in the next few chapters, I'd like to look at how Jeremiah is really a great exemplar of those three principles.
- 00:44:09 We often think about Jeremiah as being very stern, harsh. It feels like all he does is invite accountability, but I think if we look closer, you're going to see that he really weaves these three principles together just as the Savior did. The challenge for people like me, for humans that struggle to be like the

Savior, is maintaining those three principles simultaneously. As a parent of teenagers, the moment they started getting a little unruly, I felt like, okay, now it's time for inviting accountability and love and agency went out the window. When we get off balance in that way, we are really losing the center of gravity, which is leadership that's anchored in Christ's example.

Hank Smith: 00:44:57

I have learned that when there are big emotions going on, probably not the best time to teach.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:45:03

Sometimes in those moments of big emotion, you want to start with love, you have to start with love. In fact, the thing that has been revolutionary to me as I think about these three principles is it sort of challenges the sense that when it's time to correct, it's time to be hard. But what does it look like when we invite accountability with love? What does it look like when we are honoring agency the same time as we are inviting accountability? The Savior demonstrates an ability to maintain all three of those principles at the same time. I have known leaders that are so good at that who can correct me and I just feel bathed in their acceptance even as they are offering me correction, but I can also tell that they're leaving it up to me to choose how I'm going to act on that correction. When those three principles are acting in tandem, people grow.

00:46:01

This is the model for how God leads his children. If you think about the temple, the endowment, as we study the fall of Adam, Heavenly Father inviting accountability to Adam and Eve, there's don't partake of this fruit, I forbid it. Nevertheless, it is given unto thee. Even baked into that invitation to accountability is a recognition that he's going to honor their agency. They act and then he follows through on accountability and says, okay, you've acted. I'm going to honor the agency you've taken by giving you the penalty we talked about, which is you need to leave the garden. Oh, and also, here is a savior, the greatest manifestation of love. From the very beginning of time, we see this cycle of love, agency, and accountability from our heavenly Father, which is how we grow and learn. If we're going to try to be leaders like the Savior was and the Savior is, adopting that same model is our best shot at helping people around us grow. I've really become convicted of the importance of embodying those three principles when I am trying to influence people, and if I leave any of them out, I'm not going to have the impact that I want to have.

Hank Smith: 00:47:25

Wow. Keep going, Jeff. I'm excited to see this.

Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:47:29	Well, let's take a look at how this shows up in Jeremiah. If we move to Jeremiah chapter two, verse two, we often think of Jeremiah teaching hard doctrine and his words are severe sometimes, but also if you read carefully, there are so many expressions of love. So Jeremiah chapter two, verse two, "Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee Jerusalem, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." Jeremiah uses this marriage imagery. God's covenant relationship with Israel is like a marriage, and it is so full of love and commitment. There's so much language of love mixed in with Jeremiah's words. If I can skip to verse seven, we're going to see Jeremiah's use of agency. In verse seven, he says, "I brought you into a plentiful country to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof, but when ye entered, ye defiled my land." This is a pretty big indictment, but by verse nine, hear what he says, "Wherefore, I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead." Yes, you've defiled my land, but I still have space for you.
	00:48:48	There's still an opportunity for you to change. One of the ways that we see our Heavenly Father honoring our agency is by allowing us to learn from mistakes rather than being eternally condemned when we go astray. We're going to see this over and over in Jeremiah. God's patience with his covenant children is enormous. He is endlessly seeking to give us another chance to change.
John Bytheway:	00:49:21	I'm just looking at verse nine, "I will plead with you, and with your children's children will I plead." There's a relentlessness, and we've talked about this in other episodes, Hank, because many times as the Lord's people forsake him, he's right there saying, just turn back. I'm right here.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	00:49:42	As I think about that example, I wonder how willing we are as leaders, and I'm including parenting. How willing are we to really honor people's agency as we seek to lead them? Do we allow for mistakes and recovery, or is it one and done? If you're my kid, if you're in my classroom, you step out of line once and I have marked you. But instead, could we celebrate the learning that comes from people exercising their agency without us trying to control that agency? I think we miss a lot of opportunities for real teaching when we don't allow people to make mistakes.
Hank Smith:	00:50:25	Jeff, I've noticed sometimes as leaders in the church, we don't want mistakes to be made, so we almost push people out of the way and do it ourselves. I've heard people say of well-meaning bishops, well, I don't even do anything because he just comes in

and changes it to do it the way he wants it done. Or, that will never work, therefore, let's just do it this way. I don't know. Is it important sometimes, even if you know, it's probably not going to work, to maybe give some direction, but then let it not work?

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:50:55

Yeah. If you think about the great life lessons that you and I and all of us have had, we probably learn more from our mistakes. We definitely learn more from our mistakes than when we're bailed out of those mistakes. There's a verse that lands so hard for me, verse 19 in this same chapter. Jeremiah says, "Wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." What is it that corrects and reproves? It's not someone wagging their finger and saying, see? You messed up. It's the very fact that I have had to live the consequences of my mistakes. [Boyd K. Packer](#) said, "We are punished as much by our sins as we are for them." To me, that is another excellent manifestation of the combination of love, agency, and accountability. When we're willing to invite accountability, set a standard, and then let people make a choice, allow them to fail, and then love them through the failure, they're probably going to learn more than if we're standing there correcting every move.

00:52:04

I am thinking of a personal story that's so painful and a little vulnerable, but I will share it. I was one of those dads that was really hung up about my son's hair length and hairstyle, and I'm embarrassed to say that now, but I didn't want him running around with long hair and he wanted that really bad, and we fought and fought over that. At one point, he had a mohawk, and this mohawk was kind of a joke. He was shaving his head and asked for a mohawk just to see what it looked like, and I said, sure, let's do that. We'll take a picture, and then you're going to shave your head. He said, okay, dad, that's what we'll do. He gets the mohawk. It looks pretty gnarly. He's excited about it. My wife and I are getting ready to leave town. We said, okay, you can show your friend tonight who you're staying with, but then we want you to shave your head and get rid of that mohawk, because I was embarrassed, you know, I'm in the bishopric and he's passing the sacrament.

00:52:58

It was all about me. Anyway, we leave town and I call him a few nights later and said, you shaved your mohawk, right? And he said, yep. Well, when I come home, he hadn't. He had worn that mohawk the whole time, and I came down on that kid so hard. I was mad at him for lying to us, and I was really embarrassed, and my wife sort of stepped in and said, really, Jeff, are you being a little hard on this boy? And I was chastened by that and realized I needed to have a different conversation with him. And

I said to my son, can we try again? I recognize I was pretty hard on you. So we had a better conversation, and in that conversation, I asked him, I said, what was it like having the mohawk? And he said, Dad, I'm not sure I really liked it that much, because I noticed that people were treating me differently.

00:53:52 I went to the swimming pool and the lifeguard was just constantly focused on me. He said, I think I realized that the way I look impacts how people view me and the kind of person I am. This is coming out of his mouth. He has learned this lesson without me berating him or correcting him, and I almost missed the opportunity to solidify that principle that he had learned because I was so eager to correct him. It's very humbling for me to look back on that, because this is not a matter of wickedness correcting him. It's a silly choice that he made, but even in that silly choice, he learned consequences of his actions without me needing to spell it out. And I want to end this story by saying hair length is not the biggest thing you should be worrying about as a parent. I looked back and realized I was way overboard on that. I was so grateful to be taught and to be humbled in that moment and to recognize that as a parent, as a leader, I need to allow people to exercise agency and learn from those experiences. I don't want to get in the way of that learning.

Hank Smith: 00:55:06 Wow. Thank you for that, Jeff. John and I have never made mistakes in our parenting, so it's good to learn when other people do. Thank you for being vulnerable with that. I think every parent has multiple stories of, why did I come down so hard on that? Jeff, you said it right on. It was all about me. It was all about how I was embarrassed. Oh, I didn't want others to think this. My wife has had to say the same thing to me, very kindly. She'll say, this is not going the way you think it is. And if you do this too much, you're going to damage this relationship to the point where you're going to find you can't repair it. Thank you for that Jeff.

John Bytheway: 00:55:51 I am just going crazy with my scriptures here. Thine own wickedness shall correct me, because it made me think, oh, what is it? It's section 105 verse six. My people must be chastened until they learn obedience if it must needs be by the things which they suffer. That's section 105 of the Doctrine and Covenants verse six. Some only learn by going through suffering. Maybe some people listen and go, oh, yeah, that's a good point. I'm going to do that. Some have to test the waters, maybe. Some learn by the things which they suffer. And another place that I love this in the book of Moses, the last line of verse

55, Moses chapter 6, verse 55, "They taste the bitter that they may know to prize the good." You can tell them about the bitter, but if they taste it, then they'll know to prize the good. So I'm just backing up Jeremiah 2:19 there with those two.

- Hank Smith: 00:57:00 And that word taste is interesting, John, right? It's not go feast in the bitter.
- John Bytheway: 00:57:04 Good point. You'll taste it and you go, I don't want that anymore.
- Hank Smith: 00:57:08 Jeff, I think you'd say that we have to be careful with this approach to how the ability of each child, because I'm not going to say to my three-year-old, hey, get out of the road. Okay, I'm just going to let you live with the consequences. There are times to step in and say, nope, this is not going to happen, but we don't need to do that every time.
- Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:57:30 That's exactly why these three principles need to operate in balance. We can't simply honor agency without inviting accountability. And inviting accountability often looks like teaching principles, teaching them powerfully. Sometimes inviting accountability does look like issuing consequences. And as parents, finding the wisdom to keep those things in balance is one of our greatest challenges. It's never the right answer to dismiss one of those principles. They always have to be part of our leadership.
- Hank Smith: 00:58:06 Love, limits, and latitude, I've heard it called.
- Dr. Jeff Thompson: 00:58:09 Yep. I think we can see a little bit more of this when we get into Jeremiah chapter three. Listen to verse one here. "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers." Here's Jeremiah with his flare for the dramatic. "You've played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord." Like within that same verse, one of the most grotesque sins is accompanied by an invitation to return. Skipping to verse 12, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord. I will not keep anger forever." Verse 14, "Turn O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." Yes, accountability. Yes, but it's constantly combined with this invitation to come back. What really landed for me as I'm thinking about Jeremiah and his brand of leadership here is for him, leadership is not merely about getting compliance because he almost never does.

	00:59:21	We often think about leadership in a worldly sense of, you know, you're a leader if people are following you and doing what you want them to do, but for Jeremiah, leadership is preserving the possibility of transformation. He is recognizing that his words are going to fall on deaf ears, but there is always this open door to say eventually you can change. The Lord still will welcome you back. And I find that refrain so comforting in my own life because I slide back. In my own backsliding, it's easy to feel like I've blown it now. How many times can I make this mistake before God has just had it with me? In verse 14, I am married unto you. And we know what God means when he's talking about marriage imagery. He's talking about an eternal covenant and he's signaling to us, yes, this is the standard.
	01:00:25	This is what I expect of you. Jeremiah will plead with you, will warn you, but there is always, there is always the potential that you can return to me. I love the thought of leadership that has that spirit. You may not follow me today, my ward members or my kids, but I am going to maintain the possibility that you can eventually transform and follow. That really hit me hard with Jeremiah and I'm so grateful that I learned that from him over these past weeks.
John Bytheway:	01:00:59	Wow. I'm looking at that phrase that I've just underlined that you read, "I will not keep anger forever." And it reminded me of a classic Elder Holland talk, which doesn't narrow it down very much, but Elder Holland gave a talk called The Laborers in the Vineyard. Do you remember that? He said, "We consume such precious emotional and spiritual capital, clinging tenaciously to the memory of a discordant note we struck in a childhood piano recital or something a spouse said or did 20 years ago that we are determined to hold over his or her head for another 20, or an incident in church history that proved no more or less than that mortals will always struggle to measure up to the immortal hopes placed before them. Even if one of those grievances did not originate with you, it can end with you." I've got to make a note, I will not keep my anger forever if the Lord won't. Here's Elder Holland saying, don't keep your anger for what good is that doing you?
Hank Smith:	01:02:04	Jeff, I think we fall into a false dichotomy. As a parent or as a teacher, I've either got to be a good guy or a bad guy. And sometimes as parents, we fall into that trap, like my wife is the good guy, I'm the bad guy. Right? Good cop, bad cop. And I think what you're saying here is no, there is a way to both preserve the relationship and hold the boundary. Sometimes you have to be a little more creative.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:02:27 You know, I had a meeting just a few weeks back with some of the staff at BYU who have been receiving training on the Christ-centered leader model. They're learning some of the skills that we teach and had a woman who works in human resources and her job involves a lot of correction. She came into the meeting and she said, I've just got to say, it has changed my life to realize that I can invite accountability and express love at the same time. And this is a professional whose work has been to deal with employee problems. Catching the spirit of that and recognizing I can approach this conversation with a premise of love, a pre-inclination toward love, and it changes the conversation. I'm no longer berating someone or chastising them with harshness and a vindictiveness. Is an act of love and with God is an act of love to correct. As we're reading these terrible curses that Jeremiah is proclaiming for Judah, if you read between the lines, he is begging them to change. He's chastising and cursing because there is the potential for change. We're going to see that in Jeremiah chapter 18. If we want to go there.

Hank Smith: 01:03:56 I remember once living this principle, John, we try to live some of the things we teach on here. I remember once one of our rules was you clean your room on Saturday and I came downstairs and there's my daughter's room and you can't even see the floor. I've always joked when Joseph Smith said, "For his feet did not touch the floor." I said, that'd be easy in my daughter's room. Your feet can't touch the floor. I thought to myself, okay, I have some options here. I could go right into accountability and harshly, harshly come after her. I would get the room cleaned, but I would destroy the relationship. I could let it go. I could keep the relationship and have no accountability. The room doesn't get cleaned. And it wasn't a dream. I actually think I did the right thing maybe once as I thought, okay, how can I do both?

01:04:51 How can I both preserve the relationship, expressing love, and hold the line, which is invite accountability? I said, hey, can I talk to you? And she said, about what? And I said, well, when you have some time, I'd like to talk to you. About what? I said, well, do you have time? And she said, yeah, I guess. And I said, do you want to come out here? Am I in trouble? I said, I just want to talk to you. She didn't want to be corrected in front of her brothers. That was something that I didn't need to do. I invited her out and we talked and I said, hey, I just want to talk to you about your room. She said, Dad, I was going to clean it. I think normally she expected me to interrupt her. She didn't have anything to finish that sentence with. Right? Dad I was going to clean it, but...

01:05:39 And instead of interrupting her, I just said, but... And she said, but I didn't. Okay. I noticed. I said, how about this? How about we clean it together? We'll talk about... I think she was obsessed with the Greatest Showman at the time, so I said, we'll listen to the Greatest Showman. Really? We had a great experience. We honestly had a good experience. We were singing the songs and cleaning together and I thought, there is a way. There is a way to preserve the relationship and invite accountability. It's just, you got to be a little creative and maybe not fall into that false dichotomy of I got to do one or the other. Am I onto something, Jeff?

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:06:20 You are. Let me add the third leg of the stool because you expressed love, you invited accountability, but the other piece is also essential, honoring agency. When we put those three things together, leadership starts to look more like curiosity than like instruction. And I noticed you asked her a couple of questions. Do you want to go talk here? Should we go talk there? You left it up to her to complete the sentence. One of the things that we're teaching so much in the Sorensen Center is how we use questions to teach and to influence, which is what the Savior did. If you count the number of questions he asked in the New Testament, it's in the hundreds. When we lead in a worldly way, it does become about me. I know the right answer and I'm going to give it to you. What we're teaching with the Christ-centered leader model is we're inviting the other person to participate with us in their growth and learning.

01:07:17 We're there to support them. We're not there to control them. It is a radically different way to approach leadership and parenting. If I can just stop and make a little plug here. If folks are hearing about this and want to learn more about the Christ-centered leader model, I would point them to our website. It's sorensencenter.byu.edu. Presents the model, it gives you some resources, some scriptural background. We'd love to have you dig into that. We've also just released a training that anyone can take. It's offered through BYU Continuing Education. It's called Christ Centered Leadership. It's an eight module course. It's not for credit, you earn a badge, but it's a way for you to really engage deeply and practice some of these skills and principles that we're talking about. So if you're interested in this or you're listening, you want more, there's some more resources you can look at.

Hank Smith: 01:08:12 Wow. How great. And it's Sorensen, S-O-R-E-N-S-E-N.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:08:17 Yes. Sorensen Center. S-E-N. [Sorensencenter.byu.edu](https://sorensencenter.byu.edu).

Hank Smith:	01:08:22	To learn how to be a better parent effectively, not just hope, but actually go in and say, I want to learn some skills, to do what you said your friend did, to come in and say, it's changed me.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:08:36	Yeah. I wish I knew when I had little kids what I know now. So now it's my grandkids that I get to influence.
John Bytheway:	01:08:44	I think you should put your clean up your room story on the website there. That was a good one where you combined both. And a movie soundtrack at the same time.
Hank Smith:	01:08:54	And a movie soundtrack. I didn't notice the honoring agency part, but I have noticed, and both of you, I bet you'd have a testimony of this, my children resist having their agency taken away. That might be something godlike in them. It's shocking. Like, well, stop resisting me taking away your agency. Man, who do I sound like in the premortal life?
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:09:17	At what age do children start to say, I want to do it myself. Myself. At what age do they want to make choices? Smart parents realize early on it's much easier to dress your child if you give them three choices and they get to choose which one. It is a hunger. We know instinctively as children of God that we are meant to have agency and our kids demand it. We need it, we crave it, and it doesn't change because we become adults. When we're leading people and they feel coerced or controlled any way, they're going to rebel against that. We have to have choice. It's oxygen to us.
John Bytheway:	01:09:56	I deal with these kinds of questions at the beginning of every semester. Hey, sorry, I'm going to be absent. Hey, sorry, I'm going to be absent. Hey, I've got this. I'm going to be absent. And here's a question. What are the natural consequences of being absent? And ask the question. I love my students, but what are the natural consequences? Well, you might miss something. You might miss the attendance points. You might miss something that might be on a quiz or on a test and the tantalizing lecture, but I understand. So this is a helpful discussion for me.
Hank Smith:	01:10:34	Yeah. Jeff, I have a feeling I know the answer to this, but how do you feel about the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants? Because I think you just started quoting it.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:10:43	Yeah. Well, it is required reading every time I teach my organizational behavior class. I cannot talk about power and influence without D&C 121. The final verses of that section are

probably the best manual for leadership I think has ever been written. I think it's a masterpiece.

Hank Smith: 01:11:08 Yeah. I am with you. The fact of where that came from. Where did that come from? A dungeon in a tiny town in Missouri.

John Bytheway: 01:11:18 A temple prison, somebody once called it.

Hank Smith: 01:11:21 Yeah. Yeah. And yet, here's an expert in leadership saying, it's never been written better anywhere else.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:11:28 I stand by that.

Hank Smith: 01:11:29 Why do we sometimes want to take away agency? Is it easier? Is that why I can control this little person?

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:11:37 Yeah. It does feel easier to lead with control, and people try to do it. When we use force and compulsion, as D&C 121 talks about, we can often get immediate results, which is, you know, what Jeremiah never got. But what we lose is long-term influence, because when we violate that principle of agency, we might get compliance, but we don't get commitment. We don't get people who have made a choice for themselves that they want to follow because that choice has been denied them. So you might think operating under control is going to get you by in the short run, but if your interest is in creating a long-term relationship of influence, it's a recipe for failure. It is the legacy of tyrants. You think about the tyrants throughout history, their endings were not good. They almost always end in disaster and failure and their nations falling apart. Coercion does not last, and it'll be true in our families as well.

Hank Smith: 01:12:50 You can build a throne out of bayonets, but you can't sit on it very long.

John Bytheway: 01:12:56 I have to remember that. We might get compliance, but that's not the end goal. We don't get commitment. We don't get a change of heart. Nothing was learned. And that's why, like, they learn obedience by the things which they suffer, because they at least learn something. That's the outcome you want more than just compliance.

Hank Smith: 01:13:18 I want to add another witness to what you just said, Jeff. And I know to all the parents out there, this is hard. Parenting is one of the most intimate parts of your life. Here we are kind of poking at it. So if it hurts a little bit, it hurts all of us too. Here is [Elder Paul V. Johnson](#) back in 2014. Control, force,

manipulation. These things can produce compliance, but they won't promote conversion. If there is any real progress with the child, it is in spite of compulsion, not because of it. Unrighteous dominion doesn't yield real spiritual growth because that only comes when a person chooses to do what is right, not when he or she is forced or coerced to some behavior. Forcing children to do the right thing can foster rebellion. And we've all learned it. It's difficult though. It's difficult. It's hard. I've been there. I've been the controlling parent, and I've noticed that it explodes in my face.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:14:22 Well, Hank, it is the nature and disposition of almost all men when they get a little power as they suppose. It is the lot of mankind. I would say don't beat yourself up over past mistakes. I've tried that too. It doesn't really help for me to inventory all of the mistakes I made as a parent, but we can learn from those mistakes and lead people with love, agency, and accountability rather than coercion. If you think about how much Heavenly Father believes in agency, it is a radical commitment he has to agency. He sends us to earth, gives us the power to invite children, his children, into our homes. And then sometimes parents abuse those children. Sometimes they coerce and manipulate them and he allows that to happen. This is how important agency is. It's so important that he is willing to allow terrible adversity to happen in the name of parents and leaders who exercise power unrighteously.

01:15:38 It is such a sacred trust when we're given children in our homes and I feel that burden. I remember the first time bringing a baby home. It was like, what do I do with this? How am I qualified to raise a person? It's just utterly overwhelming. How do you do it? You make mistakes. Sometimes we hurt our kids. We don't mean to, but it's how we learn and it's how we learn to exercise our own agency while respecting the agency of this child. We need to give a lot of grace to parents and to ourselves for the mistakes that were made. This is the first time we've ever been parents. It's a new gig for us. But we have the Lord's promise that he is willing, he is eager to give us another chance and another chance, and he's provided a Savior who's provided an atonement for us that can heal all of the hurts that we experience and all of the hurts that we cause. I can't imagine being a parent without the Atonement.

Hank Smith: 01:16:51 My children were having a conversation a couple of weeks ago, maybe it's longer than that. They were talking about, who are you scared of more, mom or dad? My daughter, who's my oldest, said, oh, dad, for sure. And my two youngest boys, they're twins, said, Dad, why would you ever be scared of dad?

She looked at me like, they have a completely different life than I had from the oldest to the youngest. I said, Maddy, you're right. They have a better father than you did. Isn't it okay to just turn to that child and say, I am so sorry. I am so sorry. I had to tell her I was sorry. And she accepted that. She said, yeah, you were new, right, at this. We almost joke around that she's our little burnt pancake, right? We came in way too hot and we turned down the griddle and John, you taught me this, to repent to your children, to apologize and ask for forgiveness. It's not a weakness.

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| John Bytheway: | 01:17:52 | Family prayer is a perfect time to talk to your children when they won't interrupt. And to repent to your children during family prayer, that's... |
| Hank Smith: | 01:18:03 | In your prayer, you mean in your prayer. |
| John Bytheway: | 01:18:05 | Heavenly Father, I'm sorry I lost it with the kids today. That wasn't very wise of me and I love them, and I love that family prayer is set up, maybe it was set up just for that, Hank. |
| Dr. Jeff Thompson: | 01:18:18 | Oh, John, I love the spirit of that. Thank you for sharing that. I have given several apologies to that first child of mine who was the beta test for our parenting. I think we got a little bit easier going with the other children. I'm wondering if we can turn to Jeremiah 18. I want to make sure we don't miss the pottery story. |
| John Bytheway: | 01:18:39 | Yeah, the object lesson. |
| Dr. Jeff Thompson: | 01:18:41 | Yes. It's one of Jeremiah's great metaphors. The Lord instructs him to go visit a pottery shop to observe the potter. In verse four, you see what he observes. Jeremiah says, "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter, so he made it again, another vessel as seemed good to the potter to make it." In verse six, he brings this home. He says, "Cannot," and this is the Lord speaking, "Cannot I do with you as this potter, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel." I think there are a couple of things here. One, going back to giving ourselves grace as parents. We're going to get it wrong a lot of times, but we're also pottery. The Lord can reform us as parents. This is a metaphor that Jeremiah is actually designing for the house of Israel. |
| | 01:19:37 | I mean, the imagery is really meant to say, Judah, you can repent, you can change, you can be molded. But I really do think we can apply this at an individual level as well, that we can be |

clay in his hands. I know some people read this passage and sort of see it as a destiny statement. God's going to fix me no matter what I do wrong. He's the potter and everything's going to be okay. But I don't believe that's the message we're supposed to take away here. I think this is another agency story. Do we choose to be the clay? Because this is what Jeremiah is asking of Judah, allow yourself to be molded. And we really get this in verse eight when he just lays it on the line. He says, "If the nation against whom I have pronounced a curse, if they turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." This isn't the classic sort of repentance we're talking about.

01:20:36 This is God saying, yes, I've issued a curse through Jeremiah. You change your behavior, that curse is gone. Like, this curse is not a definitive destiny for you. We can change the outcome at any moment that we choose to be malleable in God's hands. That's a beautifully hopeful statement. It actually reminds me of something about human psychology that I teach every semester. [Professor Carol Dweck](#) is a brilliant social scientist who identified a personality trait that is so fundamental to human difference. In the book *Mindset*, she refers to growth mindset or fixed mindset. She identified that even as early as childhood, some people approach life with the idea that if I'm not smart, I can get smarter. And if I'm not talented, I can work hard and get more talented. Whereas a fixed mindset is when folks say, this is who I am. I'm not smart.

01:21:37 I'm bad at math. I'm never going to be good at math. Having that sense of fixed mindset is really so damaging spiritually. If we feel like I'm just a bad person, I'm not very spiritual, I'm not a good scribe, I don't understand the temple. When we make these self-limiting statements, we're falling into that trap where our statement actually becomes destiny because when we believe we're unable to grow, that statement becomes true. We can't grow. And we actually see this in Jeremiah, in that same chapter in verse 12, where the people respond to the curse and say, "There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices. We will every one do the imaginations of his evil heart." It's sort of like we're stuck. We can't change. Man, as I listen to Jeremiah here, I just see this call for a growth mindset for us to believe that he is warning us so that we can make changes in our lives. Our curses are not set in stone. We can choose to be putty, be clay in the Lord's hands, and he'll reshape us into something better than we could have imagined.

John Bytheway: 01:22:54 Yeah, I like the metaphor of the potter. If he can create us once, he can recreate us. He can remake us, reshape us.

Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:23:04	I encountered such a remarkable example of that in a book I read recently. It's called <i>The Sun Does Shine</i> . It's the story of a man named Anthony Ray Hinton , who was falsely accused of murder despite all of the evidence exonerating him. He was nowhere near the site of the crime, and yet in this deep south courtroom, his guilt was sort of predetermined. He was sent to death row, and he describes in the book how he spent his first three years in complete silence. He talked to no one. He was filled with rage. He just had so much darkness in his soul and so much anger. And then something happened three years in where someone was suffering, another one of the inmates, and he reached out, extended just a moment of kindness and he realized that he was the one choosing how he was going to experience this terrible trauma.
John Bytheway:	01:24:03	Injustice.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:24:03	And he decided to turn his incarceration into ministering. In the book, you see him grow to love and appreciate and not judge these men, many of whom are monstrous, but he finds a way to love them all. He spends 27 more years on death row before Bryan Stevenson, the amazing lawyer you may have heard about in the, you know, the movie Just Mercy , Bryan Stevenson is able to bring his trial back to court and he is exonerated and released after 30 years on death row. I was so inspired by the way that this man could change. We sometimes feel like humans can't change. They change all of the time. We see it in scripture, we see it in real life, and we can see it in our own lives. We can almost on a dime, as he did, shift from being belligerent to being putty in the Lord's hands so that he can make this incredible vessel.
Hank Smith:	01:25:05	The sun does shine. Wow.
John Bytheway:	01:25:08	It reminds me of Stephen Covey, talks about Viktor Frankl , the concentration camps coming to the realization between stimulus and response, there is a space. And in that space lies our freedom to choose our response. He discovered that space. I'm unjustly here. I should not be here, but I can choose how to respond. Wow. What's it called, Hank? The sun?
Hank Smith:	01:25:38	The Sun Does Shine.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:25:40	And Viktor Frankl's book, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> , that's also such an incredible book. I'm thinking about the people who are listening to that, listening to this podcast, and many of them I know are probably carrying more pain than they can even reckon, and traumas and challenges that seem so heavy. I don't

want to minimize. I don't want to suggest that all it takes is a little choice and then suddenly you can be happy. My trials that I have faced, it has taken me a long time sometimes to get to that level of change. I want to promise that it is there, that even if the atonement doesn't heal this moment, that it will, it works. The Savior's capacity for healing is not limited by our agendas and our timeline. It takes so much faith and trust to hang on in those trials, but we can always choose to rely upon the Savior.

Hank Smith: 01:26:43 We often talk as Latter-Day Saints, oh, Jeremiah, he's same time as Lehi, and that's about as much as we give him, right? I love that I'm getting to know him and I'm feeling a lot about his situation. Let's keep going. What are we going to do next?

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:26:59 Jeremiah is a prophet who feels the feels. He's so vulnerable. We see him rage against God. We see him want to quit. He has questions. He grapples with these questions. He's just the real deal as you read him. That shows up nowhere more strongly than it does in chapter 20, which I have to tell you, I just keep reading it over and over again because the emotional journey that he takes us on in that chapter is really remarkable. As backdrop here, what's just happened is, and Jeremiah receives all of this persecution, but he has this really terrible experience where a man named Pashhur, he's a religious official in power, he beats Jeremiah and then he puts him in the stocks. I did some research on what stocks are. We can think in sort of colonial times, people would be put with their hands and their head in a stock so they could be a public display.

01:28:06 This is a little bit worse. The stocks in Jeremiah's time was a contraption that would contort your body and put you in great pain. So when you're put in the stocks, it's really torture. It is a public torture. You're set in a place where people are there to mock you. And so this is what Jeremiah is going through after all of his effort, after all of his warning and love and care for the people. He has this incredible experience. And as I've read chapter 20, I told you that I thought Jeremiah's a pretty theatrical, dramatic person. I started wondering what it would be like as a theatrical monologue, what would it look like to see Jeremiah one-on-one speaking to someone from his heart? What I'd like to do is probably a little unconventional, but I wanted to try to capture what I'm hearing in Jeremiah through doing sort of a paraphrase in more modern language and try to capture the feeling.

01:29:09 This is my take. I'm envisioning Jeremiah, his body contorted, and he's probably there for hours. He's on public display. He's actually positioned at the gates of the temple. As people are

coming to the temple, people who are supposed to be devoted followers are looking at Jeremiah and mocking him and probably spitting upon him, and I'm imagining the indignity of that, the humiliation he must be experiencing. I would like to pay some homage to Jeremiah, but by trying to share what I'm hearing from him.

Hank Smith: 01:29:46 I'm excited, honestly, Jeff. I know that you're a little bit like, I don't know if I should do this, but I actually am. Love to see your gifts used to make scripture come alive.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:29:55 Thank you. I appreciate that. It's one way that I've felt I can make sense of what he's experiencing here. In that moment of crisis, and starting in verse seven, what I hear him saying is, Oh Lord, you persuaded me to do this. You overpowered me. And now look at me. I am in derision daily. Everyone mocks me. Every time I speak your word, it's violence, destruction. And because I keep speaking your word, I've become a joke to everyone around me. So I finally told myself that's it. I'm done. I will not make mention of God anymore. I'm not speaking his name again.

01:30:55 But his word was like a fire inside me in my bones. I tried to hold it back. I wore myself out trying and I couldn't. And I can hear people whispering about me. They're waiting for me to fail. Even people I trusted, they're saying, maybe we can trap him. Maybe we can overcome him. Then we can have our revenge. But the Lord is with me. He is stronger than they are. They're not going to win. They're going to stumble. They will be the ones who are ashamed in the end. Lord, you see what they can't see. You see what's really inside people's hearts. You know me. You know them. So let me see you set this right.

01:31:55 Let me see you take vengeance on the people who have persecuted me. I put my cause in your hands. Praise the Lord. He rescues the poor from the hand of the wicked. He delivers them. But I cursed the day I was born. Don't call that day blessed. I curse the man who ran to my father that day and shouted, you have a son! It made my father happy, but I cursed the man who brought it. I wish that day had never happened. I wish I could wipe that day away. Why didn't I die before I was born? Why couldn't my mother's womb have been my grave? Why was I born just to see trouble and sorrow to spend my life consumed with shame? Why was I born for this? And that's how Jeremiah ends chapter 20. I'm grateful that the Lord has given us in the Old Testament a prophet who is not sanitized, who's not varnished. It's just raw. And you see him want to quit and

		then calls for retribution. He is running the full range of emotions here.
Hank Smith:	01:33:29	He's testifying and then he's weeping. He's angry and then he's faithful.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:33:39	For me, it is remarkable that the Lord is allowing us to see a prophet who is living faith and pain at the same time, who's living faith and doubt at the same time. He is experiencing it all at once. I think about dear friends who are facing unimaginable challenges or who are grappling with faith questions and feel like, oh, I must be broken. But you've got good company in Jeremiah. I mean, he lays it all out there for us. His doubts, his questions, his despair, his loneliness. And I think there are not many prophets where we get to see that authenticity of sorrow and pain. So this is why I love this man. I feel so connected to him after digging into his words.
Hank Smith:	01:34:43	What a way to bring scripture to life. That was very moving.
John Bytheway:	01:34:46	And it was different than Jeremiah going through all that and then writing a talk. This is like real time. This is how I feel. And that's like you said, Hank, he's here and then he's here and then he's here. And so I love how authentic that was.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:35:03	We get that in 2 Nephi 4. I mean, Nephi's lament seems this very put together, faithful person. Then he gives us this glimpse. Oh, how I treasure that. And for me, discovering Jeremiah 20 was like another moment like that, that he permits me to go on that very human journey with him. I don't know if Jeremiah would have liked my rendering or the way that I'm interpreting it. What I do know is that he is willing to bear his soul, warts and all. I honor that. I'm amazed by that.
Hank Smith:	01:35:38	An angry prayer is still a prayer of faith. You're angry at someone. I hope there's more of that to come, Jeff. What are we going to do next?
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:35:46	Well, I'd like to take stock for a minute because my job is to teach leadership and to help people become Christ centered leaders. And we've covered a lot of ground here, but there are a few things I just want to point out is make sure they land. As I've said, Jeremiah does not have many victories. We learn that Christ centered leadership, it's not measured by outcomes, but by faithfulness. This is a really important thing for parents to understand and for people who are struggling in their careers to understand. We don't always get the worldly success that we

attribute to great leadership. That does not mean we're not great leaders. If we're exercising faith like Jeremiah did and doing our best, that is Christ centered leadership. Another thing that really resonates with me is that leadership often means telling people what they don't want to hear.

01:36:39 We are a center for moral and ethical leadership in the Sorensen Center, and that means taking an ethical line often makes you unpopular. I guess I want listeners to think about the cost that Jeremiah was willing to bear to be true to the principles that he had to teach, even though they were wildly unpopular. He was right before the Lord, even when he wasn't quote unquote right politically in the environment he was in. I'm thinking about how leadership can be a very lonely endeavor. We often like to think of leadership as sort of glamorous and exciting to be in charge. I've had the blessing of serving as a counselor in multiple bishoprics. I've known a lot of bishops well. There's not a lot of glamor in bishopping. There is a lot of loneliness. Undertaking leadership is a recognition that sometimes we are going to feel alone.

01:37:40 I want to hit this again and then I'd like to share some personal experience that leadership may not solve the problem, but it preserves the possibility of transformation. That has become so important to me as I think about being a father. If I could be a little vulnerable again, I'd like to share what I've learned about parenting because it's been kind of a hard path in many ways. As parents, my wife and I, we tried to check all of the boxes. Family prayer check. We did family home evening, we did family scriptures, we did scouting, we did young women's. We tried to be as fully active. And if I'm being honest, I was probably a little bit smug about that. As my children were young, I would look at families with children who struggled and think, well, you know, we've got this. We're doing it the right way. I was really confident that our kids were going to stay on the straight and narrow.

01:38:39 But of our four children, we have one who is actively involved in church and following the gospel path. I want to say that I share this with my children's permission. They know I'm going to talk about this and they're supportive, but watching that happen to my children one by one has felt at times like a huge personal failure. I internalized their choices and berated myself, would think back on all the mistakes I made and assume that I must have really messed this up. When my oldest stepped away from the church, he also stepped away from the family. He really checked out of everything, dropped out of school. I was devastated. We had just moved to a new ward and I remember

going to sacrament meeting and every time there was a mission farewell or a mission homecoming, it was like a dagger. I just would sit there choking back tears.

01:39:41 We didn't talk about that with any of our ward members. It just felt like this was an unspeakable thing. And obviously if they find out that our children are making different choices, they're going to think differently of us. That turned out to be pretty foolish to hold that back because as we started opening up, we realized we were in very good company. We had many, many friends, probably most of our friends who were experiencing the same thing. All of this was coming back to me as I'm reading Jeremiah and reading about this man who is trying so hard to help people be righteous and having them make different decisions. I eventually did what Jeremiah taught. I turned to the Savior to ask him for help, to forgive myself, to forgive my kids, to just love them. This was a long path, Hank and John.

01:40:37 I just remember feeling for years like the ability to let go of this hurt was just beyond my grasp. I couldn't quite get there, but I eventually reached a moment. I was in a very sacred place. I remember vividly talking to my heavenly father about the pain that I was carrying and just saying to him, I'm so tired. I am so tired of this boulder in my chest, this hurt, this anger, this despair. Will you just take it from me? Can I just give this to the Savior? It wasn't an actual voice, but it was a real prompting. The answer was, yes, I can take it from you, but you have to give it to me, which was such a remarkable thought. I recognized that I was clinging to that despair, to that sorrow. So I took the Lord at his word and I said, yeah, I will, I will give it. And in an instant, the pain was removed from my heart. It was the biggest relief I have ever experienced in my life. I was somehow, because of the Savior's grace, able to let go of that pain. And in that instant, it was like my whole body was flooded with love for my son, for my whole family, for myself. All of the pain was replaced by this outpouring of love and the relief that I felt was, I can just love my son.

01:42:22 I can just love my children. That is all that I have to do. That moment has changed everything. And I'm not, I'm not going to say that it's always easy, but I am really blessed because in my wife's wisdom, she taught me early on when we were experiencing this that the most important thing is preserving the relationship. And we did that. We continued to reach out and to make our kids comfortable in our home. The result of that is that our kids love each other and they love us. And when we're together, I cherish them. I take so much joy in being with them. I love how they make me feel. I'm proud of them. I never

want them to feel like my love and support for them is dependent upon anything. I will take them as they are. It was really hard for me to get to that place.

01:43:22 As I think about my dear brothers and sisters who are just in the middle of this, I get the sorrow and the pain. I want to hold out hope. For me, the hope, it felt like it needed to be an assurance that they were going to come back and everything, you know, we're all going to be in the temple together. Like that's what I wanted to have happen, but the answer was not that. The answer going full circle was love, agency, and accountability. I can love them with my whole heart. I can honor their agency to pursue their path, and I can invite accountability only through the way that I live, because I've taught them everything that they need to know. All that's left for me to do is to live as a saint the best I can. When they see me and my wife, they know I don't need to keep preaching to them as I'm sharing this.

01:44:22 It's hard to believe how far we've come in accepting what it means to lead a family that is not all in the church, but we're all in together. Now I know there are some people listening who have not reached a point where their kids are connected with the family. I have had the experience of something like an estrangement for a prolonged period of time. I know how painful that is, but I would just love to offer my assurance that the atonement will work in your family's life. Healing will come in the Lord's time and way. I have learned to live with that hope and to take joy in my family as it is.

Hank Smith: 01:45:13 And they sound like wonderful people.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:45:17 They're amazing. They really are remarkable. They are all so different from each other. They're so different from me and they enrich my life every day.

Hank Smith: 01:45:27 I love it. A parent will say something like that to me, like I'm so worried they don't go to church and I'll say, well, what kind of person are they? And almost every time, I think every time, oh, they're wonderful. They're so kind. They're so good. They would help anyone. John, you know my line. The Lord cares far more about who has your heart than who has your membership record.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:45:53 I have this dear friend who's so wise. We were hiking once. We were both talking about our kids and I was weeping. I was still in a place of sorrow and I was weeping about one of my children and I just said, this child is not in the gospel. And my friend stopped, like, stopped dead in his tracks and he turned to me

and he said, Jeff, that's not true. Your child is in the gospel. Your child may not be going to church, but you look at the kind of person that child is, what they do, how they behave, like they are still in the gospel. And then I cried even more because I felt the truth of what he said, and I'm so grateful for that moment because I've come to accept that my kids might not be in church, but church is still in them. It still impacts their lives. I feel that when I see the good in them, and there is so much good. I love them. I'm so proud of them.

Hank Smith: 01:46:53 Yeah. God has their heart.

John Bytheway: 01:46:55 Jeff, I love what you said, that the answer you got, yes, I can take it from you, but you have to give it to me. Gee, who would you rather give it to? I think the one that we call a redeemer, the one that we call a restorer, the one that we call an advocate, a mediator, that's who you're giving it to. Who else? As we love to say, Hank, he is mighty to save it is his work and his glory, not our work and our glory. It's his work and his glory to bring to past their immortality eternal life. We can't do it. I can't do it, but he can do it. Well, he's like, give it to me. I got this.

Hank Smith: 01:47:35 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 01:47:35 I love it.

Hank Smith: 01:47:36 John, I've told you this story before, that there was a moment where I was saying my prayers and it was something to the effect of, please help me with my children. The Holy Ghost stopped me and said, you have got to restate that. That is not what we're doing here, so please change your mindset. And, you know, the Holy Ghost is supposed to teach you what to pray. That's right in the Book of Mormon. The Holy Ghost will tell you what to pray. Honestly, it changed my prayers. I said, submitted for a second. I said, please show me how I can help you with your children.

John Bytheway: 01:48:10 They're not ours. They're His.

Hank Smith: 01:48:11 These are not yours. I am not assisting you in this work, right? Yeah. You are the assistant. In fact, you're part of the patient. If you just will get out of the way, love these kids and let me do my work.

John Bytheway: 01:48:25 And that's back to Jeremiah 1:5. I knew them long before you did. I know them. I got this. Lot of hope in that. Yeah.

Hank Smith:	01:48:35	And Jeff, you're right. It freed me up to love them, knowing that it's not my job to save them.
John Bytheway:	01:48:40	To save... I can't. I can't save myself either. I've got to give it to him.
Hank Smith:	01:48:46	Yeah. No wonder it's heartbreaking and frustrating when you're trying to play the wrong role.
John Bytheway:	01:48:51	Yeah. It's not my job to save. I can't do it.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:48:54	Started out by asking the question of how do you lead God's children when they're going to exercise their agency? How do you lead without having control? And the answer is you never do. We never have control, and nor does God exert control over us. And so it's this losing battle that we continually try to fight by trying to control the outcomes, control the decisions that people make. We are fighting a losing battle every time we try that. It is not the Lord's way with his children.
Hank Smith:	01:49:26	It is not. And control is kind of the opposite of faith. Faith means I'm letting this rest in your... This is your territory, your domain. I'm giving it to you. Sometimes we have faith in the outcome we want, right? John, you're the one that taught me that. What's your faith in, the Lord or in the outcome you want?
John Bytheway:	01:49:46	And when you want it, yeah. What's the thing that John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Well, this is a really long walk. The Lord has the long view in mind because he knew us before we even got here, there's time. But we want our timing and we want our outcome when we want it, but I love that. Just hand it to him and then trust him.
Hank Smith:	01:50:12	We somehow think that when our children aren't attending church, they're not walking in truth. These are great people who do great things, who love others. That is walking in truth. And Jeremiah would look at us and say, you guys don't have my problems.
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:50:31	What are you so worried about? He's rolling his eyes at us a little bit, probably.
Hank Smith:	01:50:36	These people not going to church is the least of my problems. Right? Right. Thank you for that, Jeff. We have parents all over who I'm hearing a collective sigh of, it's going to be okay.

Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:50:49	It is. It is.
Hank Smith:	01:50:51	And you can hear that, the Lord saying that to Jeremiah, yes, I want you to teach. Yes, this is hard. Yes, it's heartbreaking, but it's going to be okay. Doesn't he promise him, one day I'm going to gather them all?
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:51:04	In fairness to Jeremiah, I mean, we ended on a really low point for him, but you get more of him next week. In later chapters, you're going to see him have a vision of what it's going to be like when Israel is restored and he awakens from a dream and it's very sweet to him. Jeremiah's going to be okay too.
Hank Smith:	01:51:23	Yeah. Jeremiah's going to be okay too. It's something we've talked about all year, which is yes, there is a scattering. There is. They're not keeping God's commandments. They are going to be scattered, but he's not scattering them beyond his reach. They're never lost to him. There's always the promised gathering. I think every parent needs to hear that. Oh, there's... Redemption always follows the fall. My friend Jared Halverson taught me that. Creation, fall, redemption. There's never creation, fall. It's creation, fall, redemption. Jeff, this has been fantastic. You've told us stories and had dramatic readings, and you've showed us Jeremiah in a new light. I honestly, I really feel differently about him after having heard your perspective.
	01:52:17	I think our listeners would be interested before we let you go. You have quite a bit of experience. You've done your secular scholarship. Your work has been high level in that world. You've written books. You've studied the best leadership books that have been written, and yet here you are, you're coming back to antiquity here, finding these lessons in the Bible. With all of the education and experience you have, what brings you back here?
Dr. Jeff Thompson:	01:52:51	What a great question. Thank you for asking that, Hank. I'm thinking about the work we're doing in the Sorensen Center, and we made a decision very early on to anchor what we teach in the word of God. There's a lot of wonderful secular knowledge that we also draw upon, but anchoring in the word of God is the sure foundation. I mentioned the Christ-centered leader model earlier. What I'd like to focus in on to answer your question is the relationship to God. It is a covenant relationship. We've been taught beautifully by President Nelson that when we make and keep covenants with God, we have access to his power. Now, leadership is about power in a way. It's about having an influence. And that promise, we should not take it lightly. Our covenants give us access to God's power. I don't think that means just in church.

- 01:53:45 I think it means when I'm having a conflict with my friend, I can ask for God's power to navigate that. When I'm struggling how to get my child to clean her room, I can seek God's power to help me in that moment. And I'm surprised at how many times I forget to start there, to go to God first when I'm having a challenge with my leadership, with my influence. But it's absolutely fundamental and it's what covenant children do. It makes me think of Jeremiah's teaching about living waters, which is a constant theme that comes back over and over again. In Jeremiah 2:13, he says, for my people have committed two evils, two mistakes. Number one, they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters. I'm here to give you the living waters. Number two, they hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Think of the irony there.
- 01:54:48 You're standing next to this flowing river of pure water and it's there and we have access to it, but instead we turn to a cistern, which is like a basin that's carved out to catch rainwater. And that is not living water, that's stale water. I think about how often instead of drinking deeply from the covenant relationship we have to receive God's power, we rely on empty cisterns on the philosophies of men, which are good. There's water in there, but it's not living sustaining water. There's another time that Jeremiah returns to living waters. This is in Jeremiah 17:7-8. He says that people who trust in God will be like a tree planted by the waters, planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river. Her leaf shall be green and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." I want to be planted next to that river, and it is there for us.
- 01:55:57 We get to choose where we send out our roots. What brings me back to antiquity, to scripture, to the gospel, as I think about the things that I do academically or professionally or theatrically is a recognition that only through the living waters that God provides, that I can be sustained through the drought, through the storm. His covenant promises to me are utterly reliable. His power is accessible in a moment's notice. I have learned something about relying upon the Savior. The very moment that I start thinking about him, something changes in me, something shifts. It may not be that suddenly my crisis is solved or I suddenly have the revelation that I need, but in the very moment that we turn to the Savior, he is opening that door as we knock, maybe in quiet ways, maybe in subtle ways, but if you pay attention, I promise you that he is eager to answer our inquiries, our pleas. That's why, Hank and John, that's where the source is, that's where the living water is. I am so grateful to be

in the covenant and have access to God's power because I need it. I can't do it on my own.

Hank Smith: 01:57:33 Jeff, thank you. Thank you for taking time for us in your preparation and here in recording.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:57:39 Well, it's been a blessing to me. I don't know that I would have dug as deeply into Jeremiah as I did, but I invite others to do so. This has been really such a blessing to spend time with both of you. Thank you so much.

Hank Smith: 01:57:53 Well, we have loved it. We got the right guests. Jeremiah and Jeff both have a flare for the dramatic.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:58:01 I get this guy.

Hank Smith: 01:58:02 Yeah. I think you'll both get along really well when you meet. With that, we want to thank Dr. Jeff Thompson for joining us today. We want to thank our executive producer, Shannon Sorensen. I bet since we have Jeff here, he would say, hey, thank you Sorensen family for the Sorensen Center. We're going to do a double thank you here.

Dr. Jeff Thompson: 01:58:24 I cannot thank the Sorensen family enough that their generous gift is making such a difference at BYU. I'm so grateful.

Hank Smith: 01:58:32 Yeah. And for us as well, for our whole team as well. Thank you to David and Verla Sorensen. And every episode, we remember our founder, Steve Sorensen. He would've loved this. I bet he does love this. We hope you'll join us next week. We have a little more of Jeremiah and Lamentations coming up on followHIM. As a thank you to our wonderful listeners, we'd love to gift you the digital version of our book, Finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. It offers short, meaningful insights drawn from our past Old Testament episodes. Visit followhim.co, that's followhim.co, to download your free copy today, and you'll also find the link to purchase the print edition. Thank you for being part of our followHIM family. Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew, David Perry, Lisa Spice, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, Heather Barlow, Amelia Kabwika, Sydney Smith, and Annabelle Sorensen.

followHIM Favorites



Hank Smith:

00:03

Welcome to followHIM Favorites. John and I share a single story to go with each week's Come, Follow Me lesson. John, we're in Jeremiah and I have a story for you. I thought of it when I read Jeremiah 1, where the Lord says, "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee." Jeremiah, I knew you long before you were born. Then a little bit later, the Lord says to Jeremiah, Jeremiah, I want to show you something. Go over to this potter's house and watch him work. He goes over and he says that this potter is making this vessel, this is Jeremiah 18, he's making this vessel, it gets messed up. It's marred, it's flawed. So the potter restarts it and makes it again. And then the Lord says in 18:6, O Jeremiah and to the house of Israel, Can I not do with you as this potter? Saith the Lord, You are clay in my hands.

00:52

Here's the story, John. It's told by a man named Theodore Tuttle. Now, this is mortifying to me. I don't like making mistakes or damaging other people's things, especially someone who I'm nervous to be around anyway. Theodore Tuttle is going on an assignment with Boyd K. Packer. That would make me nervous, John. I bet it would make you nervous to say, okay, I'm going to drive Elder Packer to this assignment. Please don't mess this up. I'm sure my wife would say that before I left. Just whatever you do, don't mess this up. Now, you have to know in Elder Packer's life, as a hobby of his, he would carve wooden birds. He said sometimes it would take up to a year to complete one. He said, I would measure the feathers, I would study the colors, and then I would carve them.

01:37

He said, I would even carve a setting for them. He said it was very restful. It sounds frustrating to me. He said, sometimes when I would be frustrated and unsettled, my wife would say, oh, go carve a bird. I might have to use that. He said, it was very calming in my life. Theodore Tuttle is driving him to an assignment and he had brought one of the carvings he was going to use as a lesson. He was going to show it, and we had put it on the backseat. At an intersection, Elder Tuttle slammed on the brakes. The carving tipped forward upside down onto

		the floor and broke into pieces. Oh. It's not the worst thing in the world, John, but I just feel for Elder Tuttle, don't you?
John Bytheway:	02:18	Yeah. Oh, yeah.
Hank Smith:	02:20	Oh, no. I just broke the apostles wood carving. He pulled over. They both got out and looked at it. He was devastated, John. Oh, I can't imagine. Elder Packer, I'm so sorry. I will fix it. I will take care of this for you. I will take it to whoever need... right? I promise I'll take care of it. Well, without thinking, he said, I was not devastated. And I said to him, oh, forget it. I made it. I can fix it. Now, Elder Tuttle and I think Elder Packer both saw the lesson, which is sometimes we go to the Lord and we think, I'll never recover. I've done too much. I'm broken. Almost without thinking, can you hear the Lord going, oh, I'm not devastated. I made you. I can fix you.
John Bytheway:	03:13	I can fix you. I fix broken things all the time, including you. Oh, I love it. Like the potter.
Hank Smith:	03:20	What did our friend Sheri Dew say? Without a scar.
John Bytheway:	03:25	Yeah, the Savior heals without a scar.
Hank Smith:	03:27	Without a scar. We hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcast. We are with Dr. Jeff Thompson this week. Now, Jeff is a professor of leadership development and you're going to watch what he does with Jeremiah. It'll be something that you won't see on your own. It's really profound. It's going to bless your life in many ways. Find us over there and then come back here. We'll do another followHIM Favorites.