

402: Easter (Come Follow Me D&C Week 14)

April 4: Easter (April 3-4; General Conference)

April 11: D&C 30-36

April 18\*: D&C 37-40

Happy Spring! Happy Easter! Happy Vaccines!

Confession: In addition to being incredibly busy, focused, and present in my own life (I'm celebrating that!) as I mentioned in my last podcast, one reason I have been hesitant to invest more into the podcast is that I am painfully aware of how many wonderful resources there are for the Come Follow Me curriculum.

So for this episode, I want to explain the particular purpose and benefit of this particular podcast. It isn't for everyone (though I actually design it in a way that it can benefit everyone, as I'll discuss in a moment), but I do believe this podcast makes a unique and valuable contribution.

I will explain the particular approach of Engaging Gospel Doctrine, review a handful of other resources our listeners recommended, and then for Easter I want to reissue a reading of Carol Lynn Pearson's Holy Week, which is a favorite of mine.

What is Engaging Gospel Doctrine and why does it matter?

The question that inspired this podcast, waaaaay back in 2011:

How do you meet everyone's needs, if people need different and even mutually exclusive things? Specifically, how do you spiritually nourish a group, whether it be a Sunday School or a ward or a podcast audience, so everyone can get what they believe they want, can get what they don't realize is good for them, while also respecting their preferences, strengths, and sensitivities? The greatest challenge may be that what the minority needs (a more critical and rigorous approach to religion) will damage the majority (who need a more basic nourishing approach that helps them get through their weeks and lives). The reality is more nuanced and context matters, but I think this pattern remains generally true.

Jesus' teaching style demonstrates sensitivity to where everyone is. If you have ears to hear, listen. The perfect approach is one that allows everyone to get what they need while also strengthening and challenging them so they are open to more, increasing their capacity, inviting them into their growing edge. Growing edge is a term of maximum productivity... if you aren't challenged you don't grow, but if you are challenged too much, you break, and it sometimes even prevents opportunities for future growth! This is why the invitation of the podcast is "Challenge and be Challenged by the scriptures"

My own approach to religion/ministry has evolved from strategy to activism to design.

2002-2009: Strategy

2009-2013: Activism

2013-Present: Design

Through my undergraduate, I believed \*every word\* of Church doctrine. As those familiar with my story know, I literally designed my entire PhD program based on 1 Nephi 13. I wanted to discover the real truth behind the Bible, uncorrupted by the Great and Abominable Church, right?

### Strategy

As soon as I got to graduate school, I realized that history did not line up with what I was taught growing up. Academia explained LDS culture better than LDS culture explained academia. A summer at BYU in 2003 really drove home the tensions and juxtapositions, as BYU PhDs cautioned me about my Biblical Studies PhD program!

So in graduate school I deconstructed and rebuilt LDS theology. This podcast benefits directly from this process. I believe there is a range of healthy ways to engage with LDS theology, as I expressed in my “gospel down the rabbit hole” sections. Through graduate school my main framing was strategic communication... figure out what people want and need and are ready for, and then speak carefully to meet and nurture them where they are (which is a deeply pastoral approach I now realize).

### Activism

In 2009 World Religions blew my mind and soul open in the most wonderful, beautiful, constructive way, and I shifted to a more activist frame. I realized that all religions are profoundly human and uniquely powerful. I also for the first time studied and taught the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the context of wider Christianity (“Restorationist Protestantism” is the umbrella term for the LDS movement). Seeing the Church in maximally broad context (theology, culture, institution, history, etc) increased my awareness of the importance of taking a stand for well-being. Speaking carefully is not enough. I believe that we should assess the health of the institutions we belong to and stand up for what we feel is right. No institution is perfect, even if divinely guided. All religions, all institutions, are primarily human, guided by inspiration. We cannot abdicate our conscience by just going along with the way things are. Mindful conscious engagement is the only ethical way to engage with systems, including the Church (some will find this idea of activism within the Church heretical, but I disagree). Remember that Jesus’ entire ministry was based on radical subversive engagement with current religious and cultural systems.

I was delighted to realize that I accidentally improved on the Serenity Prayer, which is one of the greatest sources of wisdom I’ve ever encountered. Training prison volunteers inspired the

following summary: Think outside the box. Work within the box. Change the box as possible. The Serenity Prayer breaks life into two categories: what you can't change (accept that) and what you can change (do so). My threefold approach is more elegant because it recognizes that change is not a can/can't binary, but rather a process, a tension, a conversation. Our ability to change ourselves, relationships, institutions, and systems is always fluctuating. If we just accept everything we can't change, not much will change (I do agree we need to begin with compassionate acceptance of reality as it is). So the ideal approach is to imagine the best reality we can, work within systems as they are, and then combine our vision and engagement to bring reality as close as possible to our ideals. This is transformative acceptance.

## Design

2013 is where I felt my specific "call to ministry". Teaching World Religions again and again shaped and shifted me, but teaching the Future of Religion in 2013 made everything click. I realized that acceptance, empowerment, and redirection were more powerful than direct persuasion or attempts to convert. I realized that the most powerful thing we can do is take what people already love, value, and invest in, and make those things more effective and healthy. Instead of converting people to other ideas, we can convert their ideas to their healthiest versions. Design is superior to persuasion. Persuasion encounters all sorts of obstacles as people resist unfamiliar ideas, defend their groups and traditions, etc. A sobering insight ministry has taught me is that we value our stories more than our lives. Good design can bypass all of this. Good design just feels right and beautiful and effective. Good design just WORKS, whatever people believe or fear. My highest value is elegantly efficient approaches to well-being. One of the biggest surprises in my years of ministry has been to realize that I feel more passionate about healing systems than ministering to the individual, as meaningful as that remains. Healing systems facilitates the most good as efficiently as possible.

So what does all this have to do with this podcast? I have aimed to design a podcast and teach Sunday School in a way that an atheist could respect and a believer could claim. This podcast motivated me to found my own non-profit, the Olam Institute. This podcast and non-profit has changed my life for the better. The tagline for the Olam Institute is "heal the world through religion done better".

This podcast incorporates strategy, activism, and design, but mostly it is an investment in my "religion so good it need not be true" approach. This podcast is a podcast about living well, about well-being, about thriving. I think that is the target of the gospel. I believe salvation is maximizing love, peace, joy, freedom, and growth, and so I think that saving principles are those that increase love, peace, joy, freedom, and growth. This podcast uses insights from Social Science and human nature to create commentary on LDS scripture and theology that nurtures well-being across as broad an audience as possible.

I want to teach the gospel in a way that it can reach and benefit everyone. One thing that challenges and confuses people at times is that I feel particularly called to serve those who have a hard time with traditional approaches to religion. Look up the "nones" sometime... for the

first time in history, Church attendance in the US has dropped below 50%. Young Americans especially are wary of religion. They want to be part of something meaningful, but they are skeptical about institutions and even tradition, and rightly so. The old no longer works; the new has not yet arrived. This skepticism towards religion will only increase in the US, while religion globally, especially Islam, will continue to grow. See this summary if you are interested, Pew predictions relating to religion in 2050):  
<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

Another reason I've had a hard time investing in the podcast is that I am SO excited about other projects I am working on. As I mentioned last episode, this year I want to write my "Human Well" book, about living a well-designed life with proper form. This book will explore Right Relationship. Right Target. Right Order. Right Work. I want to work on this book chapter by chapter and release it as email newsletters, podcast and YouTube episodes all at the same time, culminating in publishing a book! I am increasingly convinced there is a way to live well almost independent of what is going on around us. We can have a flowing source of well-being from within us. I think that is the target of the gospel. In this book I want to put together all my insights about living with proper form. Win life by putting down the game.

Engaging Gospel Doctrine is my labor of love to articulate and model this approach within an LDS context, even though the primary weight of my ministry has expanded beyond an LDS audience. I want to help as many people as possible. I want to help everyone benefit from spirituality and religion, no matter what they believe. I think that is what God wants to do and I think that is my highest purpose in life, so that is what I am going to pursue most passionately. But I'm happy to show up for this podcast as long as I can justify it as well!

I hope that that summary helps you appreciate what I am doing with this podcast and how it might enrich your lives and relationships. Again, THANK YOU to all those who have faithfully supported it. I'll step up and do the same. Every time I sit down to start an episode I struggle. Every time I finish an episode, I'm glad I did.

Ok, other podcasts. I LOVE excellence. I love well-being. I love constructive and excellent approaches to well-being. So every good thing makes me happy. Bring it on!

Here are some podcasts and resources that EGD listeners recommended:

Teaching with Power YouTube Channel (33k subscribers, nice!): Ben Wilcox "Teaching with Power" will help you teach or study the scriptures with more impact, relevancy, and power. Its primary audience is members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints using the Come, Follow Me manual to teach at home or at church. It supplements but should not replace the manual. My name is Ben Wilcox and I have taught the scriptures in many capacities for 20 years, primarily the youth. I have a BA and MA in English literature which lends to my more literary approach to studying the scriptures. (latterdayapollos? Wut?) I am a fan of Apollos, and evidently many people like this guy.

Beyond the Block: Brother Jones and Brother Knox describe themselves as staunch advocates for the theology and harsh critics of the culture when it comes to Mormonism. A black life-long member and queer convert respectively, they bring a less heard perspective to the notoriously white and heteronormative faith. They feel their desire for justice, love, and salvation for all people, regardless of color, sex, orientation, and other identities is not only consistent with the message of Christ, but *is* the message of Christ. In that spirit, they share their thoughtful, honest, and occasionally raw and humorous take on Mormonism in an effort to shift the culture of Mormonism more into alignment with the theology of Mormonism.

Faithful Feminists: Channing and Elise We noticed a unique and growing need within the LDS community, so together we created The Faithful Feminists: A Come Follow Me podcast. This podcast is an educational and empowering resource focusing on gospel principles in a feminist context through approachable and loving conversations.

Looks especially well organized

<http://www.thefaithfulfeminists.com/>

wHoly Human: Disability and neurodiversity perspectives on Come Follow Me, Katie and Serena.

Dialogue Sunday School: As Christine shared: Dialogue Sunday Sunday School. Different, impressive teachers on the 2nd and 4th week. Darrien Gray (on March 28th), Patrick Mason, Greg Prince, etc. @ 10:00 AM on zoom and Facebook. Recorded for later watching. They also have a monthly fireside on the 3rd Sunday (this weeks speaker is Terry! Givens). Very stimulating!

Book of Mormon Central: Supplement your study of 2021's Doctrine and Covenants Come Follow Me Curriculum with resources from Book of Mormon Central. Here you can find Videos, KnoWhys, Articles, and commentaries relating to each week's Come Follow Me lesson. The team consists of archivists, researchers, writers, editors, reviewers, illustrators, narrators, audio engineers, video engineers, web designers, web and mobile developers, graphic artists, and social media publishers in addition to support personnel.

Unshaken: Seismic shifts in the religious and secular landscapes are destabilizing the faith of millions. Join religion scholar Jared Halverson as he explores restored scripture, doctrine, history, and practice; examines patterns and pitfalls in navigating faith crisis; and wrestles with ways to make your faith unshaken.

Follow Him (Hank Smith and John Bytheway): Welcome to followHIM, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me study. We are Hank Smith and John Bytheway. We love to learn. We love to laugh. We want to learn and laugh with you as together we followHIM.

<https://followhim.co/>

Beyond Come Follow Me (Tom Pettitt): Hey everyone! I'm Tom Pettit. I love Church History and I love telling the stories because of the revealed truths, the clarity of God's love for His children, and the inspiring stories of those early Saints that are so motivating to us today. But I don't just tell the stories, I show how the stories of the past can help each of us draw closer to the Savior in our everyday lives! I decided to now share stories from Church history with you, and I often tell them from the sites where those stories actually took place. I'll also share the fun and entertaining stories too. Stories I share come from the Sacred Grove, the Hill Cumorah, Fayette, Martin's Cove, Nauvoo, the Susquehanna River, the Kirtland Temple, Carthage Jail, Adam-ondi-Ahman, and so many other wonderful and sacred places. Contact me at [storiesoftherestoration@gmail.com](mailto:storiesoftherestoration@gmail.com)

Talking Scripture (Mike Day and Bryce Dunford): In this podcast, Mike Day and Bryce Dunford illustrate relevance in the scriptures and discuss ideas for understanding and applying Come Follow Me and beyond.  
(Seems quite Institute/CES approach)

Latter-day Peace Studies Presents: Come Follow Me: Ben Petersen and Shiloh Logan's long friendship has coalesced around a deeply shared love of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. They've spent countless nights together with their families talking about the wonders of hope, love, and peace that come from the gospel of Jesus Christ. In these podcasts, we are searching for moments to sit with the Divine. As we contemplate each week's readings, we look for how we can understand and use the Sermon on the Mount and the atonement of Jesus Christ to more fully understand the greater narratives of the scriptures.

Saints in the South: Kenny, Stephen, Marcus, Andrew, Jackson

Saints In The South is a group of friends who live in the south and are members of the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day saints. We discuss current Sunday school curriculum, current events, and how the words of God are applied in our day. We strive to express faith promoting experiences and discuss social dynamics that are experienced all over the world as it pertains to faith and following God on this mortal journey. We hope to add our small voice to this huge world in helping build peoples Faith in Christ, as they try to fulfill their purpose in life. Our goal is to help you find joy and have fun living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition, there is an wealth of other resources such as Rosalynde Frandsen Welch's introduction to D&C 25:

Finally, in honor of Easter and New Life, I want to re-read Carol Lynn Pearson's Holy Week. I LOVE this take on Holy Week. I mispronounced 2-3 words last time and it still bothers me (I told you my photographic memory haunts me), so I want to do it again.

<https://carollynnpearson.com/short-writings>

An Evening With Rosalynde Frandsen Welch: The Curious History and Fascinating Theology of D&C 25, the Revelation to Emma

[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/yppDYfeozkXUTe0ioiD84m\\_rnzQlcd4r4y92hwg2nVtYWSQQtUNksntUcijmF7-5bDpvDY-u0ONVSVMR.JkaIdIO4YVygKLIQ?continueMode=true&\\_xzm\\_rtaid=Q6hMDVWXSqS5YPoipOeesg.1614018576432.b0a6a4814c41d624f22a1c0764930063&\\_xzm\\_rhtaid=807&fbclid=IwAR2XFhn2Y5P4bdccMmwWJNhAvk097mb8nBZB5iyL1aEllv0phWx1HQXV0vY](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/yppDYfeozkXUTe0ioiD84m_rnzQlcd4r4y92hwg2nVtYWSQQtUNksntUcijmF7-5bDpvDY-u0ONVSVMR.JkaIdIO4YVygKLIQ?continueMode=true&_xzm_rtaid=Q6hMDVWXSqS5YPoipOeesg.1614018576432.b0a6a4814c41d624f22a1c0764930063&_xzm_rhtaid=807&fbclid=IwAR2XFhn2Y5P4bdccMmwWJNhAvk097mb8nBZB5iyL1aEllv0phWx1HQXV0vY)