

Episode 20

Legacy

BRIGHAM YOUNG, PART 1

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NATHAN WRIGHT: One of the most remarkable aspects of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is its unique history. Throughout the world, great stories from faithful church members have only added to that history. This program shares some of these incredible stories of faith, perseverance, hope, and inspiration. You're listening to Legacy. I'm your host, Nathan Wright.

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NATHAN WRIGHT: Throughout the world, Brigham Young is more widely recognized than the Prophet Joseph Smith. Year after year, the pioneer leader is listed among the most influential Americans. Although the name “Brigham Young” is widely recognized, the man himself might be listed among the most misunderstood. In studio today, to help us better understand this enigmatic leader, are Chad Orton and William Slaughter. Chad and Bill, thank you very much for being here.

CHAD ORTON: Thank you.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Thank you.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Why don't you just take a moment, each of you, and introduce yourselves.

CHAD ORTON: Okay, this is Chad Orton, I'm an archivist with the LDS Church's Historical Department. I've been there for a number of years. Currently, I'm working on historical site guides so when you go to the various Church history sites, we'll be telling the same story and hopefully the right story.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Thank you. Bill...

BILL SLAUGHTER: I'm Bill Slaughter, I work for the LDS Church Historical Department also where I work for patron services heading up their consultation efforts and working with the global initiative team. My area of expertise has been as a photograph historian. This is a second book by Chad and I, the first one being *Joseph Smith's American*, and we're happy to be here today.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Excellent, and I haven't mentioned yet that the reason we're here and what we're

discussing today is your book, *40 Ways To Look at Brigham Young*. Can I just ask, first off, why the number 40?

CHAD ORTON: It's as high as we can count. (Laugh)

BILL SLAUGHTER: It's as high as we can count, and... No, no, no. Do we admit how we got this.... The real reason, and then the one you put in the introduction? 40 ways... Actually, we decided upon 40, we had 50, we had 60, we had 30, but actually the idea for this concept of the book was stolen, nah, not stolen, it was poached from other books we'd seen and they used the number 40. And, there is a more intelligent explanation on the number 40, which Chad will share.

CHAD ORTON: You know, 40 anciently, meant a lot. You know, we talk about that Christ went out and he fasted for 40 days, 40 nights. We don't know if that number is exact or if that meant he fasted for a lot of days. It rained for 40 days, 40 nights. Ali Baba and the 40 thieves, these are just terms that are used to mean a lot of something. So, when we settled upon 40, it was with the idea that there are a lot of ways to look at Brigham Young and as Bill said, we really had to struggle to get it down to 40 because there were so many more ways that we wanted to include, but we weren't able to.

BILL SLAUGHTER: And, I don't know, 40 ways just seem to work. 40. It's not too much, it's not too little.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Rolls off your tongue.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Yeah, and there you go.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Good, and that was what I was alluding to, the ancient use of the number 40, which, I think, is an interesting number and a good use for this book as well.

BILL SLAUGHTER: There you go.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, the first chapter of your book is titled "A Life of Quiet Desperation" and you quote David Henry Thoreau. Let me just share with our readers what he said. It was in his first Walden essay entitled "Economy." He comments that "most men are slaves to their work and enslaved to those for whom they work," and concludes, "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation, what is called the resignation, is confirmed desperation." So, you use this quote to describe the early years of Brigham, but in terms more than just economic. Can you explain that a little bit to me?

CHAD ORTON: You know, one of the things, we use that quote kind of to focus upon resignation that Brigham had felt like he was resigned to a life that he had to lead in so many different ways. He had been raised in, growing up in somewhat poverty, he was able to raise above it by becoming a skilled craftsmen, a skilled carpenter, but he hadn't raise his lifestyle much above what his parents were.

BILL SLAUGHTER: And that's not to say he lived a bad life. He lived a probably pretty normal life for a life on the frontier.

CHAD ORTON: He was a living life that the vast majority, 90, 95 percent Americans were living at the time. And, most of the Americans were just, this is our life, we're going to live this.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Very simple, and just they're okay with it

BILL SLAUGHTER: Humble beginnings

CHAD ORTON: Humble beginnings. But, for Brigham there was always something, and I think the phraseology said, there was something in the back of my mind that said there was more to life than this, that life consisted, there was always something more I was seeking. But, for the first 30 years of his life...

BILL SLAUGHTER: Now, remember that, the first 30 years of his life, so he's...keep going. Keep that number in mind.

CHAD ORTON: In that day and age, it's fairly approaching middle age because more people don't live much past, you know, 70. He's middle age thinking there's got to be more to life than what I'm experiencing. I'm happy, I'm married, I've got a lovely wife, I've got some children

BILL SLAUGHTER: But, there's something

CHAD ORTON: But, there's something that I am missing, and I don't know what it is, but there's something that's just gnawing at me.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Are we going back to another ancient 30 year old here?

BILL SLAUGHTER: Well, that idea of 30 again, is not any numerology or anything like that, but that's when Brigham finds the Church and converts, finds that gospel, I should say, and 30 is, you're well on your way in life, that's quite a time to be making a really revolutionary change in one's life. He's going, really like you say, from pretty humble life, he knows his life, he knows what comes and goes, he knows his neighborhood, he has a good enough reputation to maintain a living, but in that desire, he's looking for something more, he found it in the gospel when it came to him. And so, embracing the gospel, he changes his life completely. You know, 30, people are kind of entrenched, and that's one reason we used this quote, is this quiet life of desperation. You know, Thoreau basically says people need to live life in a way that they're noticing what's going on, they know that they examine their life, and Brigham does that very much. And, I don't know if he read Thoreau ever, but the fact is that he was living that life where you don't just default to desperation.

CHAD ORTON: And you know, Brigham as he's growing up and I think the story is well told he only had like 11 days of formal education, but he spends a lot of his time studying the world around him like he's going to school. He studies how to...the farm life, his mother is sick at an early age; he has to learn domestic skills. You know, one of the stories I love is, he'd frequently get up in conference in later life, and sit there and say, I wish I could tell you women how to do these things so you don't burn your bread, so you don't have the problems that are...

BILL SLAUGHTER: And I know what I'm speaking of.

CHAD ORTON: Because I've done it before. Yeah, he knows what he's speaking of. So you know, with Brigham, there's something there and when the gospel comes, and we see this with not only with Brigham, but we see it with so many Saints in the early day, we see it now with many people who join the Church, that their lives have required or they, a complete change of who they were, almost overnight. And, in Brigham's case it was a dramatic...

BILL SLAUGHTER: Yep. This is a man who's going to, he's not sitting back doing his carpentry work, thinking someday I'm going to make hundreds and hundreds of speeches and they'll be known throughout the world for good and bad. He was, in every aspect, pretty unprepared for what would happen the rest of his life, uh, humble beginnings, not given to public pronouncement. I wouldn't even say he was particularly charismatic in the sense that Joseph and others have been. But! There was a training in his practical way of executing life. The way of how do you get things done. How do you organize yourself? How do you take care of the needs of others? You know, when mom's getting sick you do what you have to do for her, to make life keep going, so there, you know, you didn't have the classical...

CHAD ORTON: You can see in Brigham's upbringing he's taking care, learning how to do the things on his own that the Lord is preparing him. There are other things that Brigham has to learn after he's risen to leadership. You know, Bill talked about he's not prepared to give these speeches. When Brigham readily admits, even to his dying day that he's afraid to get up and give a speech. There's just something, he gets nervous when he's talking. And he talks that um, on one occasion, he notes, I was probably close to 50 before I was comfortable meeting someone who's famous. You know, I was afraid to talk to these people.

BILL SLAUGHTER: [CHUCKLE] He is...

CHAD ORTON: And that's just the Brigham we don't envision.

BILL SLAUGHTER: You know, we don't ever think, you know, that he has fears just like the rest of us, and the idea of meeting somebody famous, famous meeting the famous.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Exactly, he being probably the most famous man in the West.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Yeah.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, you both alluded to some of his childhood upbringing stories, let's, would you each tell a one or two, just maybe that is not as well known, to our listeners. Someone mentioned the one about taking care of his mother and I'm not sure that is as well known.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Well, you know, that's the one that I think of, you know, he grew up in a household that was, you know, I use the word, humble. Humble also means that they were on the frontier and life is one, is hard scrabble. You're needing to get things done. When his mother gets sick, he is the one who (for lack of better term) he's the nurse. He's taking care of the domestic needs, as well as, being the regular farm boy, being a hire, he's also taking care, how do you get clothes that have to be cleaned, food has to be cooked, house has to be taken care of, his mother has to be taken care of. Somebody has to do that. And, to me, in studying this and reading this, this is where that practical Brigham – there's more to Brigham than just being practical. He's a Renaissance man, (which we'll talk about later), but the fact is, something has to be taken care of, needs need to be met. Get in and do it. What we also learned is that the modern CEO tends to be, in corporate America tends to be hands-off, you know, I'm the guy who goes out and shakes hands. Well, Brigham was very much a get-dirty, take off the shirt and push the wagons, you know, put out the fires, and I think he learned that early on. That's what stands out to me.

CHAD ORTON: Not only domestic, put out the fires, he talks about all the things that he had to do as a youth to help his father. They frequently moved. He was born in Vermont. They subsequently moved again, and again, they kept going west, and Brigham had to spend a lot of time, as a young man, clearing forests so that they could plant, he had to, and they struggled. Stories that are told that he would have to, they made a living harvesting maple syrup. And Brigham, as a young, youngster, barley past 10, 12, would have to carry this maple syrup into town, which was about 12 miles away, where he would then trade it for goods and then walk back. It wasn't an easy life for him. And on top of that, you know, his mother was sick; she died when he was 16, at which time his father said, you know, Brigham, you now have your life ahead of you, go ahead and make, make of it what you will. Prior to that he had been working to help his father and now he was, he was going out and seeking his own way in life.

NATHAN WRIGHT: You mentioned the way he could get things done even as a youth. One of my favorite stories was when he and his brother were left at home alone as the family went away to do something for a couple of days, and they just became so hungry because there was nothing in the house to eat, so he got the rival off the wall, shot a robin and made some stew. And...

CHAD ORTON: He shot the first thing he could find. You know, but it also shows how hungry they were that he would go out and...

NATHAN WRIGHT: Exactly.

CHAD ORTON: I mean, that would be what they were subsisting on, he and his family. So...

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, Brigham was one of the earliest converts baptized in 1832. What was his attitude toward religion prior to his conversion?

CHAD ORTON: You know, Brigham, his parents were Methodists, and Brigham eventually, reluctantly joined, became a Methodist. But he kept, you know, going back this idea that there was something more in life that he was seeking. He thought religion should make you happy.

BILL SLAUGHTER: I think that's one thing, you know. Our chapter is called "Seeker and Convert" I mean, he yeah, he was seeking, he was actively...sorry go ahead

CHAD ORTON: No, and you know, he'd been, he'd been seeking for years prior to, before he, the missionaries arrived to receive the Book of Mormon. He had been looking at the idea that the people he knew that were religious weren't very happy. He's thinking religion ought to make you happy, that's the purpose of life.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Which would be a theme throughout his life

CHAD ORTON: He will come back to this again and again and again. He thought that religion ought to be not just a set of unused values that you talk about on Sunday, but ought to be an everyday way, everyday way of life.

BILL SLAUGHTER: ...way of life, way you act in your business, the way you act in your family, the way you act on Sunday, should all equal to the same person.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Which wasn't necessarily what his father showed him, is that true?

BILL SLAUGHTER: That is correct. I think, you know, as Chad said, he thought religion, he found a lot of religious people not to be happy and one of them was his own relatives, and I would say it was more than just not being happy, some were downright mean.

CHAD ORTON: And this was not just, you know, this family, I mean, he talks about, you know, he couldn't, like the old testament, you can only go so far on the Sabbath, he couldn't listen to music...

NATHAN WRIGHT: And no dancing.

CHAD ORTON: No dancing, any time. This was fairly common with the religion in America. This was an attitude that grew out of the puritans that, this is what religion should be, and in some way...

BILL SLAUGHTER: Serious business

CHAD ORTON: Serious business. And in some ways, Joseph Smith, when he introduces the gospel, he is introducing a few that is so contrary to what is being held in America.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Could we say revolutionary?

CHAD ORTON: Revolutionary! (Chuckles) That would be a good word, that's what I'm looking for. And in some ways that's what Joseph and Brigham are alike, that they are both seeking for a happier, better way of...

BILL SLAUGHTER: You know, in *Joseph Smith's America*, that book, in the introduction, we talk about one of the things in re-establishing the gospel on earth, is a gospel that gives one hope. It is the idea that there are positive possibilities for your individual relationship with Heavenly Father. As a opposed to a sort of Calvinistic, puritan view that said you better obey the laws for fear of negative consequences. And, Joseph very much teaches that, you know, that there is hope in this, that life is more than, uh, surviving at the very most humble way, life is more than just preparing food, life is more than just looking out for physically and financially for those you love, but there is an eternal purpose to all this...and YES! man is that he might have joy. And I think that resonated with Brigham Young in spite of his sometimes, sometime reputation among some people, that he was a grouchy old man. One of his many reputations that are contrary to the reality. So, when Brigham is introduced and he's seeking, when we said he knows something is missing from his life. You know, he's living that life of quiet desperation, but hasn't resigned to it yet. So, when this appears on the horizon for him, it's something that he can embrace and wrestle with and say, now this, this might do my life some good, and this has a possibility of all religions, of being hopeful, therefore bringing happiness in the best sense of that word.

CHAD ORTON: And see when, you know, Brigham, you know, was born in Vermont, but he ended up not too far from where Joseph Smith was. Brigham Young is four years older than Joseph Smith, and we know Joseph Smith experienced, you know, the burned over district, the revivals of upstate New York. Brigham Young also experienced those revivals. He went to those; he was also caught up in this experience.

BILL SLAUGHTER: That's part of his seeking.

CHAD ORTON: And you know, not surprisingly, he would go to these meeting and he'd come away from them thinking what have I learned from hearing morals, nothing but morals, I think he said of Lorenzo Dale, um, you know, the great preacher...

BILL SLAUGHTER: uh, well known...

CHAD ORTON: You know, I haven't learned anything that would change my life and better my life. And what's interesting is, you know, he talks about religion, the ideas that are taught him, he

said, I couldn't have swallowed them as if they were greased over. There was no way I could swallow these. There was no way they could make me happy.

BILL SLAUGHTER:[LAUGHING]

CHAD ORTON: I would rather go into a swamp at midnight and try to describe what I'm seeing as tried to describe and accept what I'm being taught. And it's not surprising that when the gospel is first introduced to him, when he encounters the Book of Mormon, he says well it's just like every other religion. You know, I don't hold out any great hope for it. So, you talk about an early convert, he was, but Brigham spent two years wrestling with these facts before he joined the Church.

BILL SLAUGHTER: And, I think that's probably the right word, is that he did wrestle with, he didn't um, he even gauged it, looked at it, tried it on a little bit here and there, and came to terms with it.

CHAD ORTON: You know, he first liked, you know, okay I like the religious aspect of it, I'm coming to accept, I can understand the religion, the ideas that are being taught, but one of the things he was curious about, how did it affect the Church? How was it affecting these people because he'd seen that religion and other aspects weren't affecting them positively.

BILL SLAUGHTER: You know, isn't that a question a lot of people have, all the time is, is, um, boy, you know, if this is so good how come these people are so pickled faced or how come, uh, you know, they're – if they're so moody now what were they like before? I don't know if this will...

NATHAN WRIGHT: (Laugh)

BILL SLAUGHTER: So, I think his questions were pretty, pretty legitimate, you know, and at that age, he's got the maturity to say, okay it's got to work or I'm not gonna go there.

CHAD ORTON: And you know, he's curious whether, you know, every day aspects of their life were being affected by it, not just Sunday. What is interesting is that after two years Brigham said that what finally converted him (and I think this is a valuable lesson) he said there was a Mormon missionary came who Brigham said, I could easily out talk, I could out easily out think, you know, I had everything over him, but when he bore simply testimony, this, this simple uneducated man... that is when Brigham determined to become baptized, that is when the gospel, when it really entered into his heart.

NATHAN WRIGHT: And once he accepted it, and prior to his baptism, he, it says in your book, that he pondered what effect it might have on his family and his friends and he concluded that Mormonism was worth losing both.

CHAD ORTON: Yes, he made that statement.

BILL SLAUGHTER: That's a pretty, uh, you know, we tend, sometimes we look at historical characters we tend to just go over that, and oh, that's an interesting, you know, over-the-top statement, but I don't believe that. I think he meant that with his heart and soul that he did really, you know, again being a more mature than, you know, a 20-year old or a 15-year old, he realized that his actions have consequences, even some, especially, not even, but especially something as important as religion and of course we have the benefit of how, I mean, he never looked back. Uh, we also know, he brought a lot of people with him, so...but, that is an important concept. He's saying, look everything that's a value to me, I, you know, it, this religion, this, which I believe to be the gospel is so important; I'm willing to take a chance. I think that's a powerful statement that we can't easily overlook.

CHAD ORTON: Yeah, and you know, when, for his, even though he took that view, you know, his wife later joined the Church. He said I never asked her if she would [CHUCKLE] whether she would join, we talked about it, but what she was going to do with it, she later joined, as did most of his brothers.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Yep.

CHAD ORTON: And his fathers, as well.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Yeah.

NATHAN WRIGHT: They probably knew Brigham well enough that he wouldn't jump in without knowing what's going on.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Yeah, I think he was probably okay, if Brigham's going to do it, there must be something to it, let's least look at it and give it a whirl.

CHAD ORTON: Yeah, he was very, you know, like Joseph Smith, he was very studious. He spent a lot of time trying to study things and think things out.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So Brigham joins the Church how long after that does he become a missionary?

BILL SLAUGHTER: Uh, right off the get-go.

CHAD ORTON: Uh, you know, that's one of the things....

BILL SLAUGHTER: And now, go ahead you may be about to say the same thing I'm....

CHAD ORTON: One of the things that impresses me about Brigham and we see this change in him that he is, I mean, it's almost overnight, uh, you know, here in Salt Lake, they have the Lion House, you know, on there there's a crouching lion and most people have eaten there,

they know of the Lion House rolls. But it reflects this attitude that comes over Brigham when he joins the Church. The first thing he has to do is he has to roar and let everyone know about the good news. And...

BILL SLAUGHTER: I think he's determined. That's always a word that comes through for me, least, is that you know, he's determined to do all the things he thinks are necessary to truly live this new religion that he's joined, and that, partly what I mean by that, is he's willing to do those things that are really uncomfortable for him. And, everyone of us knows that, that we can always rationalize our way out of, I don't really like public speaking, and dah, dah, dah, dah, we can, we've, he didn't, not only did he not flinch, but he just, he embraced those things.

NATHAN WRIGHT: The quote from page, let's see, 13. "I wanted to thunder lest my bones should consume me, consume within me". So, he felt the change.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Passion

NATHAN WRIGHT: He had the passion and it didn't matter what the comfort level was, he was going to do it.

BILL SLAUGHTER: I think that's absolutely right, and that's, you know, we assume Brigham is always been that way, but it was a change, he was a changed man, and willing to grasp that change and go with it.

CHAD ORTON: You know, and what's impressive about that is that, you know, I'm not sure we don't know how many of his neighbors he converted that first time, or what the end result was, whether it was a great experience or wasn't but that really didn't matter to Brigham because, you know, in the next few years he would go after mission after mission and many of these he would call himself on. He didn't wait for the prophet Joseph Smith or somebody else to say, Brigham you need to go on a mission, he just said, I need to go out and spread the good work.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So he ended up in Eastern United States, Canada, Great Britain, several different missions.

SPEAKER: Yeah

BILL SLAUGHTER: Now a lot of missions aren't, you know, they could be a few months or, uh...all they way going to England for a couple years, leaving when he was literally deathly ill.

CHAD ORTON: You know, in section 126, the Lord says to Brigham (and I don't have the scripture in front of me) to the effect, you know, revelation to Joseph Smith that Brigham you no longer have to leave your family and go on missions. And you know, a lot of people would say, why is this revelation here, well at that time, Brigham had been a member of the Church for about nine years. And he'd spent more than half of his life on missions.

You know, and these weren't easy. Part of what we don't understand is you go on missions; he would leave at the start of every summer and be gone all summer. Well, for someone who's dependent upon crops, the food that you grow, that takes a great deal of faith to leave your family.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Somebody's got to pitch in for you. Somebody's got to help take care of your family. Something's got to happen.

CHAD ORTON: Something's got to happen there for him to do this. But, he continually goes on these missions to spread the gospel and he has a great influence and great effect upon people. You know, the other thing about these missions that I love, is like when he goes on the mission to England, he's as poor as can be. When he leaves he said, my hat I made from an old pair of pants. I didn't have a coat, I took the blanket off the bed. But, he's willing to do this even though things aren't ideal, even though things aren't perfect for him. Because he felt that need to go forth and to preach the gospel.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Well, after that, on the one, he was very sick. That sounds sort of underwhelming how I put it; he was deathly ill, uh...

CHAD ORTON: When he goes to England

BILL SLAUGHTER: Yep.

CHAD ORTON: That, you know, both he and Heber C. Kimball are deathly ill, they're with, probably malaria.

BILL SLAUGHTER: Probably malaria from that area of Illinois and people are asking not to go, and they literally dragged their sorry behinds across the country and my golly, they made it.

CHAD ORTON: And you know, one of the things is not only were they sick when they left, their family was sick and the story I love, is that as they're pulling out of Nauvoo in the wagon Heber C. Kimball, who he's traveling with who's also a good friend from New York, joined the Church about the same time, says, "Brigham, let's give them a cheer." And so, they stopped the wagon, and you read the account it's very moving about how they struggle to get to their feet and then feebly take their hat over their head and say, "Hurrah, Hurrah for Israel." And that had a great effect on them and also upon the families who watched it.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Since I work in video for the Church, there's a great seminary video that depicts that scene, very, very touching and very well done.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NATHAN WRIGHT: This is such a great topic and we've got such great fascinating stories to tell. We're going

to split this up in two episodes. Join us next time on Legacy for part II.

[END MUSIC]