



Be Zealous About Sunday School | A How I Lead Interview with Mark Castillo

October 16, 2024

Kurt Francom:

It's finally available. I've been working on a manuscript for the past four years and it is finally a book I can hold in my hands. It's titled, *Is God Disappointed in Me? Removing Shame from a Gospel of Grace*. This book has gotten so much attention that it is already a number one Amazon bestseller. I'm beyond amazed. In just a few words, I wrote, *Is God Disappointed in Me?* for Latter-day Saints who often feel overwhelmed by the Gospel and who are constantly worrying if they are doing enough. It's for the Latter-day Saint who have stepped away from the Church. It's for the individuals who appear to be living right but still can't find peace and happiness. And frankly, it's for everyone who enjoys listening to the Leading Saints podcast. You will love and cherish this book. Now warning, you might want to consider purchasing multiple copies to share. One bishop who got an advance copy, read it in one weekend, and then literally purchased 100 additional copies. You can order it on Amazon, The link is in the show notes. Or starting in March, you can find it in your local Costco in Idaho, Utah, and Arizona. It's called, *Is God Disappointed in Me?* And you can order it now. Everyone, Kurt Fringam here with Leading Saints. This is another How I Lead interview where I bring in everyday people and simply ask them, how is it that you lead in your calling? And today I get to sit down with Mark Castillo. Now, I think I pronounce his name Castillo because that's like the Spanish version of Castillo. of the name, but we'll talk about that way. It's Castillo, and he's a Sunday school president in Highland, Utah, and he's got unique approaches, thoughts, and perspectives on maybe some approaches to running a Sunday school organization in a ward with teacher council meetings, and how do you get the teachers feeling comfortable in teaching, and just the simple tips and tricks that he goes by. I think you'll appreciate this How I Lead interview with Mark Castillo. Everyone, we've

brought Mark Castillo into the studio today. How are you? Good. Thank you. Good. Now, we had a lunch a few weeks ago as I don't know. There's the you know, there's going to be rumors getting out. If you go to lunch with Curry, sometimes you end up on his podcast. But here you are, whether you like it or not. Absolutely. Yeah. Not a problem. Excited to be here. Not too far from where I live in Highland, Utah. I'm in American Fork. And you were part of a book club that you guys focused on my *Is God Disappointed In Me* book. So that was cool. You invited me all to lunch. I pretended like I was a star for lunch. It was a lot of fun. And it came up that you are a Sunday school president. Yes, I am. And how long have you been in that role?

Mark Castillo:

I think like two and a half years. Oh, wow. Okay. Yeah. Two and a half. Good amount of time. Yeah. Almost three, maybe. Yeah. Something like that.

Kurt Francom:

Cool. Now, do you guess, maybe put yourself into context, your background, your, you know, were you raised in the church? I mean, anything comes to mind.

Mark Castillo:

Sure. Yeah, so I would say I was kind of raised in the church. I say that because our family was semi-active up until I was about 10 years old. And then a few things happened that I actually didn't get baptized when I was eight. And one thing led to another. And when I was about 10, I got the missionary lessons. And so I was like an investigator and I received the missionary lessons. I was, you know, invited to read and pray about the Book of Mormon. And, you know, I was 10 years old at that time, and I can still remember them inviting me to read about it and pray if it was true or not. And I can still remember, like it was yesterday, kneeling down at my bed, praying about it and receiving an answer that, you know, it was true. And so I was, baptized shortly after that. I was born and raised in Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii. So did all this happen in Hawaii? Yeah, this all happened in Hawaii. And I remember, back then the font was outside. So it was behind the tabernacle in Honolulu, if you're familiar with it. And, and so there was behind the tabernacle, there was an outdoor font. And you know, this, you know, beautiful, trees, coconut trees, and I still remember getting, you know, getting baptized. And so at that point, our family slowly became reactivated and came back to church.

Kurt Francom:

And then you were, I mean, they had that testimony you were in from?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, you know, I was in and, you know, I think, you know, how we, you know, in the Book of Mormon, you know, it always says the word remember, right? Like Helaman 13, I mean, it says it like 20 or 30 times, right? And so I've always remembered that. And I think that's one thing Heavenly Father said, okay, you know, I'm not gonna make you forget that. Yeah, that's cool. So yeah, so our family got reactivated. And you know, my dad was a bishop. And so, you know, we got raised in the church. Since then, after high school, went on, actually went to BYU in Provo and then went on a mission to Venezuela. Oh, wow.

Kurt Francom:

Because your last name is, it's more Latino, right?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah. Yeah. So actually, interesting thing about my last name, you know, in Hawaii, we like to say things differently. So I actually pronounce it Castillo. I pronounce the L's.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah.

Mark Castillo:

My heritage is Filipino-Hawaiian. And so in Hawaii, we were just, I was just ready. They said the L, so I've always said it. Oh, interesting. Except when I was in Venezuela on my mission, I, you know, I said it, the, you know, the L's were silent. But yeah, wonderful mission. Loved it there. When I came back, went to BYU, got a degree in business and HR. And so that's what my career has been. I've been doing HR and training and organizational development for about 30 years. So, yeah, that's a little bit of background on me. Like I said, I live in Highland, three boys and one wife.

Kurt Francom:

Love it. Now, somebody you said somebody in your ward kind of gave you the nickname is the sunny school zealot. Is that what's the story behind that? Yeah.

Mark Castillo:

So, you know, just a little background. I was previously I was I don't know if they call it the librarian anymore, the resource person, but you know, I manned the material center, the resource center. And so, in my mind, I'm thinking, Oh, they're putting me out to pasture. And so I was so excited, you know, and I mean, I tried to do my best and handing things out and, you know, manning the TVs and whatnot. And then I got called, you know, to be a Sunday school president and I don't know, I've always kind of, my approach is, well, you know, whatever your calling is, you know, you do your best. And so I had, I think I'd spoken, you know, the beginning of the year, and then, you know, come follow me. And so there was no speaker, I think they were looking for a speaker. So I just volunteered and said, Hey, you know, and so when the counselor introduced me, you know, he said something like, you know, and we'll be hearing from Mark. And you know, I, I'd never seen a Sunday school president with so much zeal. And so I, you know, I kind of joked with him after that. So I'm Mark the zealot, you know, and so anyway, we're just having some fun with it, but that's how, you know, that's how I got that nickname.

Kurt Francom:

You're passionate about doing what you're asked and making the most of it. Yeah. Right.

Mark Castillo:

Yeah. And, you know, I, you know, I'm grateful for it. You know, if I'm being honest, you know, I, I love teaching. I do it in my day job. I do it in my, my side gig. And, you know, especially with, you know, I guess I would trace that back to, you know, I'm an old guy. President Kimball was the president when I was a youth on my mission. And, you know, I'd read somewhere that he, you know, he read the Book of Mormon at this time when he was quoted like 36 times. And, you know, he would read it kind of cover to cover was his preferred method. And that just kind of struck me. So, about 15 years ago, I thought, you know, that's, you know, and I, you know, like many, I study better at sometimes than others. And I thought, I'm going to try. And so, since then, you know, I've You know, I've read the Book of Mormon like 25 times in the last 15 years. And I don't say that to brag, but it's, you know, it's honestly been one of the most impactful things. I think that's made me a better husband, father, son, you know, friend, employee. then,

you know, spending those 20 minutes every morning, you know, as part of my routine, you know, reading the Book of Mormon. And so, so yeah, I mean, I think that's, you know, that's kind of, that's kind of been my approach. And I've tried to take that enthusiasm, you know, as the president and, you know, try a few different things, you know, to get people, you know, excited about the scriptures.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So just for fun, I want to go back to your time as the Ward Librarian, Materials Center Director. Give it a good strong title. Any, I mean, just any tips or tricks that you'd give for those that are manning the Materials Center?

Mark Castillo:

You know, just kind of being there and, you know, making sure, and look, I, you know, we, you know, you'll get the primary teacher or someone come in and, Oh, I need this, you know, and just making sure it's there, whether it's paper or, you know, the pictures and, you know, just making sure it's there. And, you know, at least at our chapel, which has like three or four wards, you know, the lost and found box just kind of grew over the years. So, You know, I just, you know, one of my projects was we just gathered everything said, Hey, everyone, you know, if you got anything here, come and get it. If not, we're going to donate it. And so, you know, we did and, you know, it was like, wow, there's because, you know, stuff just kind of accumulates. It mainly it was just being there, you know, the, you know, for people and, you know, sometimes people come by and chat and, you know, and just chatting them up and, you know, I don't know if it made their day or not. It's a good social. Yeah.

SPEAKER_00:

Yeah, it is.

Mark Castillo:

And just, you know, How you doing? We know what's going on. You know, how's the family?

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, cool. Love it. So anything you'd say, obviously Highland, Utah, Utah County, pretty, pretty traditional ward. I mean, anything you would say that's unique about it or pretty typical Utah ward?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, I mean, it's, you know, it's pretty, you know, it's pretty, you know, it's pretty typical. You know, I think, I don't know if it's a bell curve or not, but, you know, you got, you got the spectrum, right? You know, and, you know, those that are really into it, those that are, you know, dedicated and, you know, I mean, everyone's great, but, you know, you know, some people have an easier time or kind of being obedient than others. you know, so just trying to, again, just trying to be available and, you know, help and, but yeah, you know, it's a pretty typical ward. You know, one thing I've noticed is I do think that, you know, COVID was tough. And, you know, we've been back full time a few years, but I think there's, There's still some hangover from that. And I don't know if I can put my finger on it. But, you know, we've talked about that as a presidency. But, you know, just saying, hey, you know, just just being inclusive and open and just saying, hey, you know, what do you need? How can we help?

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. How would you describe like how you've structured Sunday school in your ward, a couple, you know, gospel doctrine classes or?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, so we have, we have one gospel doctrine class. Just one teacher? Yeah, we have two teachers. So they, you know, they... Once a month they teach? Yeah, teach once a month. We have the youth, you know, we have all the different classes for the youth. I think one thing that's gone pretty well is we've been pretty faithful about the teacher council meetings that we do once a quarter. And so again, you know, the church has kind of a format for that, but really giving them a voice and you know, recent one, we had two newer teachers and they were teaching teens. And, you know, their big question was, what do you do about phones?

Kurt Francom:

Oh, yeah.

Mark Castillo:

It always comes back to the phones. Yeah, the phones. And so, we had a couple, husband and wife, that had been doing it a few years. So, they kind of shared their knowledge, say, hey, here's what we do. And, you know, so I think they appreciated that. But, you know, I think the takeaway too was, you know, you try your best and see what, see what sticks, you know, you know, if the spaghetti sticks on the wall, but, you know, it's just kind of trial and error and, you know, also kind of taking those little wins, you know, like, like, you know, when you see someone, you ask a question or make a comment, you know, that's often like a really big win, you know, and so when we get these council meetings, they kind of share that and I think it, helps give them ideas. But also, I think just realizing, hey, we're not alone. And it's not easy. You know, you wish, right, there's a silver bullet or an answer that, okay, this is going to solve it. As you know, this doesn't happen. Yeah, it's always more complicated. It is. But you know, you just keep trying and Then, you know, you just hear, you know, then they get these little wins, you know, they hear these comments and they'll think, wow, they're really, they're really paying attention, you know, more than you maybe you might see in them, you know, but, you know, it's, you know, some days are better than others, but they just keep plugging along.

Kurt Francom:

Awesome. Anything with teacher council meetings as far as how you structure them, when you do them, anything like the agenda of the class, how you go through that? Yeah, we, you know, we try to follow The,

Mark Castillo:

You know, there's the three parts, right, where you kind of share your concerns, then you do a little teaching, and then you kind of invite them to act on that. I think, in my perspective, I think the Just kind of giving them a space to talk, you know. I always tell them, look, this isn't a lesson, right? This isn't like I'm not lecturing here. I'm really more of a facilitator. And they've had some really good, you know, some really good discussions. And but yeah, I think just that first part of just kind of sharing what we've learned and because it Almost always someone else in the room will say, okay, that's a great idea, or I hadn't thought about that. And so kind of letting it organically develop, but then, you know, also keeping some structure. And I always, and this is a personal approach of mine, you know, I like how they, you kind of invite them to act at the end. And so I always make sure I squeeze that in and try not, because you, you know, you often run out of time, but, you know, my mind, I think, you know, unless this is all great, but, you know, if, you know, you know, what's the one thing I'm going to do a little different or a little better? And so I always want to make sure that, you know, that they know that, you know, that There might be one thing I can do better or try different, you know, do differently. And, you know, that's kind of, you know, the oTher.

Kurt Francom:

I think that's great advice, because in these council type meetings, the talking is great. Like you said that sometimes we put too much pressure on, you know, what are we going to do? What's the agenda? But a lot of these teachers just want to talk and share ideas and talk about what's going on. But then to make sure you kind of regroup at the end and say, all right, what are we going to do different? Yeah. Time runs out. Oh, you know, great meeting. I don't, and then we're sort of, we haven't done anything. And the next time it rolls around.

Mark Castillo:

Yeah. And even exactly, even with the instructors, I mean, that's, you know, I'll fill in a few, you know, every now and then for in gospel doctrine or even in the youth and youth classes. And I will always, I will always end that way. Or, you know, it's always structured where I have like, have thoughtful questions throughout and then I'll invite them, you know, and, You know, I think I learned that from Elder Bednar. I mean, if you notice in his talks, he is always inviting us. And so I always, you know, and I think it's, to me, just as I've studied, there's something about that word invite. Right? It's an invitation. You know, it's not a, you know, okay, you know, yeah, exactly. And so I, I think the words matter. And, you know, I, if I can at least get them to think that, okay, you know, you know, I'll often say like, if I'm instruct, teaching, I'm saying, you know, this is, this is the Sabbath day, you know, you got the rest of the day. I invite you to kind of think about what we've talked about here. Is there any, and is there anything I can do differently, you know, during the week, you know, and, you know, the good thing about that too is, you know, as an instructor, it's, you're also, you know, directing it at yourself, right? So like, okay, so what am I, you know, if I'm teaching or sharing this, you know, I better follow through on it as well.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, that's really good. So do you, do you do these during the second hour every quarter or where do you actually?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, so we do it during the second hour on the, So, I guess it would be the second and fourth. So, it'd be when Relief Society and Elder's Quorum. And so, yeah, so we'll usually do it on then and we'll do, yeah.

Kurt Francom:

And then you invite as many teachers that are available.

Mark Castillo:

Yeah. So, what we actually do is we actually, we learn this through trial and error, but We kind of did all the adults and youth instructors, and then we also did one for the primary. But now we've actually separated it. So between myself and my two counselors, we'll do one with this adult instructors, one with the youth instructors, and then one with the primary. We've just found that their needs are a little different. And so we thought it just makes sense to separate them. So far, you know, we've done that this year, I think it's, you know, it's been beneficial, little smaller groups and, you know, people have been very open about, hey, what about this? What about that?

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, it makes sense to have the similar callings. As I do, I had to consider a couple leadership principles that have really helped you in this role. And maybe we've touched on some of these already, but I want to make sure we don't miss anything. The first one being conversion. What comes to mind?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, it's interesting. We We had a lesson yesterday in Elder's Quorum from Elder Bednar about testimony and conversion, which he gave in 2012, October 2012. So, you know, when I'm thinking about conversion, it's interesting. It made me think of, I actually have his quote here. Knowing that the gospel is true is the essence of testimony. Consistently being true to the gospel is the essence of conversion. We should know the gospel is true and be true to the gospel. And so, you know, it's interesting you ask that question because you know, this was the lesson yesterday, and they sent it out, they notified us in the morning, say, Hey, it's the lesson. So, you know, read it. And so I've been thinking about it, especially conversion. And for me, you know, I gave that a lot of thought. And I thought, You know, it's just like Elder Bednar says, is, you know, to me being true to the gospel is, it's like a daily act, something you have to work on. And, you know, there's that saying, right? Well, you got to put in the work. And it's often hard. And that's really what I thought about it. It's just working at it every day. And that's true conversion. And what I liked about this, you know, he talks about testimony and kind of like testimony is knowing it's true. God's conversion is being true to your testimony. And so that's what I think it just is just working at it. And, you know, that's kind of what I've, you know, tried to

have our instructor, you know, kind of top of mind, you know, is that, you know, it takes work. And it's, you know, it's more than just a feeling that you have. It's, It's work.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And so is that something you're just constantly revisiting with your instructors, make sure that's coming through in their lessons or?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, you know, I think so. And, you know, the, I think the church has done a good job of kind of structuring kind of the model and, you know, they've put kind of Christ at the center, right. And faith in, you know, faith in Christ and just, just kind of really focusing on that, you know, and that being, you know, that, you know, it's his gospel. And if we look to him, you know, you know, we'll be blessed. And, you know, so, yeah, so that's kind of what we've, you know, when we do the little teaching part, the teacher council meeting, you know, we always go back to, you know, to those, you know, the, you know, kind of the pillars, they call them of, you know, centered on Christ and kind of have a discussion about that.

Kurt Francom:

Love it. Love it. Anything else about conversion or do we cover pretty well?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, I'm glad you asked that because I'd been thinking about it because of this lesson. And again, I think I'll just go back to the thought that came to me is it's work. Yeah. You know, it's something you have to work at. And, you know, in this lesson, we also talked about maybe those that had fallen away, you know, and those that have. And I think it's when you look at the testimony piece, You also have to look at the conversion piece because if you look at it as just constantly working at it, if you don't, You know, to me, it's like a muscle, right? If you don't exercise that muscle, it's going to atrophy, right? Or if you don't, you know, your cardio, for example, you know, it's going to go down if you don't, you know, if you're not regularly walking or running or, you know, doing some kind of cardio exercise. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

Love it. All right. Next principle is embracing your teaching style. Tell me more about that.

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, so, you know, my teaching style, I think is, you know, and maybe if I can give some context, you know, we have, you know, I think there's all different types of teachers, you know, and so, like we, we have two great gospel doctrine teachers, you know, one is very, I mean, they both come with the Spirit. They both teach with the Spirit. One's maybe a little more historical or, you know, kind of fact based. And the other is more maybe principle or what I would say people based and, you know, Let me be clear. I don't think there's a right or wrong. They just take a little different approach. And so I think to me, because, you know, sometimes you think, oh, am I doing it right? And I'm thinking, look, if you reach just one person, I think, you know, that that's a win. And so, you know, my point there is that I think there's different styles. You know, my personal style is just with my background. You know, I tend to focus on kind of on the people and the stories, you know, and, you know, and, you know, people have told me, oh, you know, you're a people person, you know, I work in HR and training. Okay, so I'm a considered a people person, you know, and I know there's a number of ways to approach things, but that's kind of how I approach it. And, you know, I focus on the stories and the effect it's had on the people and how they have felt the spirit. And so, so yeah, I would describe it kind of being people and story focused. And, you know, you know, praying that when I do that, that, you know, I have the spirit that you know, the messages, the impact is, you know, what I intended it to be. Love it.

Kurt Francom:

Love it. Anything else about teaching styles? I mean, obviously just everybody has their style. Embrace it. Don't try and be like the other guy, but anything else?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah. You know, I just, um, I, and again, you know, I try to, everyone has a different style and, you know, I want people to be themselves, you know, be their authentic selves. But, you know, I think the only other thing is just making sure you ask thoughtful questions, you know, and just getting them to, you know, to think, people to think, because I think that's, In my opinion, that's where the, you know, the magic happens. And then one last thing is, I try to tell the instructors is, don't be afraid of silence. You know, like if you ask a question, because it's very tempting, give them some time to answer. You know, and so, because when you're instructing time, just you think it moves a lot slower than you think, right? And so, even if they have to count, just give people a chance to think about it because I've noticed people eventually will, but sometimes they have to think about it first.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, that's awesome. Then the last principle is choose you this day. What comes from that?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah. You know, I think to me, when you say choose you to stay, you know, to me, that's, you know, what comes to mind there is putting Heavenly Father first. You know, I know personally when I'm praying, that's, you know, I'm always praying for help to do that. And, you know, I'm a simple guy and I've noticed that, you know, when I put Him first, everything falls into place. I mean, it does. Yeah. Now, Does that mean it's going to always be great or rosy or absolutely not? But just through my experience, you know, as far as, you know, choosing, you know, as for me in my house, right? Yeah. We choose the Lord and it's never failed me. Perfect.

Kurt Francom:

Love it. Anything like, you know, just as a more like on a more practical level, Anything like an app you use, technology you use, the way you meet with your presidency or anything just sort of a unique, more practical application?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, you know, I probably like everyone, you know, I use the, you know, the church app a lot. Gospel library. You know, yeah, the gospel, you know, gospel library. I know at the beginning of the year we, We kind of did a little, you know, I took a few minutes and saying, Hey, did you know all these features? And we kind of went through that, you know, there's reminders, right? That can say, Hey, it's time to read, you know, you can have things just, and I do that too, right? nine o'clock comes and I think, oh, you know, time to read. So, you know, I've probably the, you know, the gospel app. And again, you know, not so much an app, but, you know, the different podcasts, you know, that are out there and, you know, accessing them through YouTube or what have you. I mean, I think there's so many things out there. But yeah, I mean, I think those are just a few of the ones. Love it.

Kurt Francom:

Any other point, principle, concept, story that we need to make sure we squeeze in here? How do we do?

Mark Castillo:

You know, I think the only other thing is, you know, going back to teaching, I think, you know, sharing personal stories can have a really, at least that's been my experience, that can have a really big impact as myself or, you know, an instructor shares that. I think there's There's a depth, a personal story that I think people connect with. And I have found that has been effective as an instructor and then as a participant, you know, when a instructor does that, and, you know, it's, I don't know if it's a because they're being vulnerable or we're being vulnerable or it just, I found that it helps connect and bring the spirit in.

Kurt Francom:

Perfect. Love it. Well, last question I have for you as you reflect on your time as a leader, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Mark Castillo:

Yeah, no, that's a great question. I think You know, I think the nice thing is, you know, as a leader, you have to kind of by default, you know, you have to put in some work, right? You have to, you know, you have to prepare, you have to study. So it's kind of a structure, you know, that has, you know, helped me, you know, be a better you know, be a better follower. And again, like I said earlier, whether it's, you know, father, husband, you know, friend, I just think, you know, being a leader, to me, that means you know, my opinion, you know, I mean, Christ is probably the best example of a leader we have. And so just following his example, reading about him and, you know, studying and, you know, his characteristics and his attributes, kind of what a leader should do. And, you know, in essence, that also makes you, I think it's made me a better follower.

Kurt Francom:

And that concludes this how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it. And I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email, on social media, in a text, wherever it makes the most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this experience. And this is how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guy's doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting for your area. And that's, That's where great leadership is discovered, right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great. And also, if you know somebody, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on the How I Lead segment, reach out to us. Go to leadingsaints.org contact. Maybe send

this individual an email letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We'll reach out to them. See if we can line them up. So again, go to leadingsaints.org contact, and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a future How I Lead segment on the Leading Saints podcast. And remember, grab your copy of my new book, *Is God Disappointed in Me?*, on Amazon or in select Costco stores.

SPEAKER_00:

It came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away, and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.