



The Temple is a Jesus Place | An Interview with Gary Miller

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Kurt Francom:

How's your teaching calling going? Have you ever asked a question during the second hour and suddenly everyone is looking at the carpet in silence? There are proven methods to stimulate class discussion that work like a charm. David Farnsworth does a masterful job presenting on this very subject in the Teaching Saints virtual library. What questions get people talking? How can you effectively listen to the answer they're saying without being distracted of where you want to take the class next? These are crucial principles to consider, especially in this time of Come Follow Me Sunday School. You can watch David Farnsworth's presentation by visiting [leadingsaints.org slash 14](https://leadingsaints.org/14). There, you can gain free access for 14 days to the Teaching Saints virtual library, where you'll find hours and hours of content to help you be a better prepared Sunday teacher. Hey, if you're a newbie to Leading Saints, it's important that you know, what is this Leading Saints thing? Well, Leading Saints is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping Latter-day Saints be better prepared to lead. And the way we do that is through content creation. So we have this phenomenal podcast, we have a newsletter, we have virtual conferences, so much more. Articles on our website, I mean, I could go on and on, right? And we encourage you to jump in, check out Leading Saints, go to the search bar at leadingsaints.org and type in some topics and see what pops up. We're just glad you're here to join us. I'm again excited to welcome back Gary Miller onto the Leading Saints podcast. I interviewed Gary back in August of 2021, and it's been a few years. He's been on a journey. If you're not familiar with Gary Miller's story, I will definitely link to that original episode where we get into it, and his story's online here and there. But Gary was a fundamentalist Baptist minister who was used to preaching. hellfire and damnation every year in his church that he planted, and

then through all sorts of events, ended up becoming a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And that was five years ago since that happened. And he has been on quite a journey of not necessarily a conversion of theology or belief, which did happen early on in his journey, but a conversion of culture, of figuring our people out and our systems, our processes, how to do the membership thing, and obviously led him to a path after four years of going through the temple, being sealed to a spouse, and So to hear him talk about the temple and how he frames it and the messaging that really propelled him to the house of the Lord is really inspiring and remarkable. And Gary and I were friends. And so this is more of you just listening in on a conversation between two friends discussing different dynamics and struggles and blessings and the good, the bad, the ugly. And I think you'll as always, benefit from Gary. I hope to have him on more regularly and to share some of our conversations. And he has his own podcast feeds, a couple of them that we'll link to, which if you need more Gary Miller than his preaching, there's definitely out there for you. So let's get into it. Let's return back to our conversation with me and Gary Miller. Nobody said I could do it, but I got Gary Miller back in the Leading Saints world. How are you, Gary?

Gary Miller:

I'm doing great. We need to find out who those people are. We proved them wrong. It's good to see you, man. We were just talking in the pre-show that I was thrilled to just be back on live camera talking to your face instead of just texting. So nice to see you.

Kurt Francom:

I know it for sure. Now, over the last, since our first interview, I don't know, that was probably, I don't know, three years ago or something. I probably looked it up, four. Ever since then, I get emails from time to time, I'd say once or twice a year. Hey, what happened to that Gary guy? That's right. You know, what's his story? Where's he ended up? Right. Because you've had some great online content that you produce and you've been active on social media here and there. But, you know, there's a season for all things. And so maybe just bring people up to speed. Like, what have you been up to? What's life like?

Gary Miller:

Well, again, thanks for having me, first of all. Appreciate it. So, life is good. And yes, I think a common question that I get sometimes still, it'll come in the mailbox of either one of my podcasts now is, well, are you still a member of the church? I'm trying to figure out, what did I signal that gave me the impression that I wasn't? But yes, I was still obviously part of the church and very actively so. My wife and our family has been through, like anybody else, a journey of our own, and it's ran at different paces spiritually throughout the last five years. We just celebrated our five-year anniversary in the church about three days ago.

Kurt Francom:

Oh, wow.

Gary Miller:

That's great. We crossed over half a decade officially. That sounds like legit when you say it that way. But no, we've certainly recently, I would say in the last probably four or five months, have been very involved and very active. And that's the nature of our callings now and stuff like that. Really, I think our family is very solid and happy. I still have, for those that don't remember, I have three daughters and a son. So basically, my life is controlled chaos most of the time. And none of that has changed. So yeah, I'm just, obviously, man, come on, it's the same stuff. I'm excited about Jesus. I talk about him all the time on, you know, two different podcasts and two kind of different niches and, and always excited to talk to others who are into the same thing. So yeah, I think that's it, man.

Kurt Francom:

That's great. That's awesome. So obviously, we've had like, you know, we've been in touch here and there, you know, at various points and had phone calls. Some of them are kind of interesting phone calls of struggle. I think a lot of people we like to you know, make a conversion process into our faith, like a storybook, right? You get baptized, there's a moment, and you get the baptism pictures, and then, you know, you get a calling, you get the priesthood, and then you, you know, a year later, you're going through the temple, and it's just like, isn't this awesome, right? And we can make the perfect three-minute video online of that, but Sometimes it just gets messy, especially someone with your background who has led churches and been involved on those top levels, right? And then suddenly you're trying to navigate this new path that maybe isn't as familiar to you, right? I mean, how would you describe just that journey of ups and downs?

Gary Miller:

I think one of the things I found myself telling Crystal, my wife, many times in the last five years was, sometimes I thought our background was a real detriment. It didn't really help, but some of the time, because you're coming from a, in many cases, a very different world. I think probably the differences are more cultural and they're also more in language, just the way you talk about the faith. Similar words, often very different definitions at times, and so that process of learning a new language of how we talk about faith, the new system of it, a new culture of it in terms of how it gathers, how it worships, what it looks like, sounds like, that kind of thing. Certainly, that has had its moments over the years where it's all the things that we would expect. There's been great moments. There's been plenty of frustrating ones. And there's been a lot of stuff that's, I think, been just kind of meh, right? I think what you said about conversion stories, conversion stories drive me a little bonkers. I'm not really a fan of them because they're again, I love what you said about the three minute clip. I mean, there's so much stuff on the cutting room floor that you're missing.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah.

Gary Miller:

And so it's easy to get sort of the cheap amens from the crowd when you go, you know, five years ago, I am a, I was an independent fundamental Baptist who became a Latter Day Saint. Everybody's like, yay, you know, and that's good. And I'm with it. But at the same time, there's so much that goes on behind the scenes in that when you're trying to kind of understand Okay, so now you're a Latter-day Saint. Now what? You know, what does that mean? And how do you kind of walk in and out of that week over week? So a lot of it once it's your back to your example, if you get the baptism pictures, and you're, you know, now you're there, I think so much of it was, okay, now we're just in normal practice week over week. And that is often That's not some thrilling, super spiritual experience week over week. And it's also not dramatically negative or positive either. A lot of time, we'll just kind of ride the middle of the road and you have some ups and you have some downs. The equilibrium status of that is just, you know, you're kind of just getting in the rhythm of doing this week over week. And I think it just takes time to figure that out. And I tell people all the time, you know, everybody's going to kind of run this race at their own pace, regardless of how much you want them. I mean, it took me four years and months to get into the door of a temple. Everybody's going to run this at a different pace. I mean, but God sorts it out. And that's not up for you and I to kind of control the gas. We just try to stay in the car long enough to get where we're going. He's going to take it and we'll figure it out.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. I'm curious, like, you know, as we talk about conversion and commitment, I am sort of realizing this and correct me if I'm wrong, maybe in the general Christian world, but We have a different way of emphasizing it in our faith. I actually just interviewed yesterday, which I think this will release before this episode, but I interviewed the Jewish rabbi that lives in Utah County, right? The most Latter-day Saint county probably in the church, or BYU is. I asked him this question, because we have such a tradition of standing and bearing a testimony, or articulating our commitment to our faith, or why we are committed. I asked him, how do you process that, your commitment? Why do you believe? He looked at me like, I don't really know what you're saying. It was really telling. I don't think I fully understand the dynamic happening there, but we have this tradition in our culture of, tell us the moment you were in. And then, and sure, there's often a moment or there's often stories behind that of faith development and commitment, but then it kind of gets fuzzy when we're, because that's where people are at. Like, so are you still, you still in, you still at, or are you out, you're in, or like, where are you at? We kind of make it very binary. I don't know what comes to mind.

Gary Miller:

We do make it binary. An old mentor of mine used to tell this story about when he was ordained. In the Baptist world, you get ordained. Normally, depending on the leg of Baptist you're in, you go before an elder's board or a board that's going to run you through the basics of the faith. You don't hold any theologically crazy views. And one of the questions that they ask him, he shares the story and I love it. They're like, well, when was the moment that you knew that you were

saved? And I love this. His answer was like, I'm not sure. I don't know if there was a moment. I'm literally working on this thing every day. So I think that for me, when I've had people say things to me about it, or when we talk about conversion, I think interestingly enough, in our tradition, clearly our leaders talk about conversion being an ongoing process. Yet often members talk about it as this one time event. I think that's one of the one of those gaps that is a bit puzzling. But I am someone that thinks every morning I wake up, I'm trying to figure out, all right, how do I do this thing a little bit better than I did it yesterday. But I, I think I don't ever, I'm never under the And this might sound strong, but I'm never under the delusion that I found it. I'm always looking, because as long as I'm looking, that means my mind's open, my heart's open, my eyes are open, my ears are open. Arrival theology concerns me. So, yep, I've arrived. Yep, we've got it. We've got all the stuff. We've figured it out. I mean, that seems dangerously on the edge of pride and all kinds of stuff happens from there. And then as a result, what you just said, then we sort of rack and stack ourselves and everybody else as the ins and the outs. And then we sort of make weird distinctions and we go, well, if someone's sitting in that pew every Sunday, well, they're active. No, they're not. That's attendance. That has nothing to do with being active. Versus also, you know, if someone's not there, we make these assumptions like, are they still in? Like, this in and out stuff I think is often antithetical to the gospel. The gospel I read is not so much an ins and outs thing as it is a, all of us are in this thing together. We're on different points in the journey. And give it long enough, you'll have high moments and low moments and middle moments. And so conversion is a funny thing. I get in our world of reels and 60 second TikToks that you want a story that hits. And I understand the utility in that from a marketing and messaging standpoint. But again, there's so much more to it than just You know, one day I had it and I just knew that, you know, this was true or this or the other thing. I'm waking up every day hoping that I can understand why it is true or why it is working. But I never get the sense that I found it.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. No, I'm just from my perception and the phone calls we've had and the connections and conversations we've we've had. I've never and correct me if I'm wrong, but I've never sensed this struggle as far as a conversion, you know, going back to that term, the conversion with the theology or the doctrine or even the Book of Mormon. But there was definitely a struggle with the conversion to the culture. Right. Which is really good.

Gary Miller:

I'm definitely not converted.

Kurt Francom:

And I want to go there, like, I'm curious if we got a time machine went back to, you know, Gary on year one, or, you know, the first six months and we're because unfortunately, but fortunately, because I because I love hearing your story. I loved how you shared it so much even came on this podcast and shared a little bit like you were kind of given celebrity status for a blip of time. And that may be really changed the experience and made it very unique than maybe other

people's journey. So if you're to go back in time just to with the hindsight that you have and that the wisdom you have, like what would you tell yourself in those first six months of converting to this faith? Don't do podcasts.

Gary Miller:

That's number one. Don't post anything about it. Don't say anything about it. Don't record about it. If you do, Save it in a folder in Google Drive and about six to 12 months later, then go ahead and put it all up if you re-listen to it and you're happy with it. That's fair game. I think this goes back to what is it? The sort of famous reformed apologist, James White, was the first guy I ever heard talk about the cage stage. Have I ever talked to you about the cage stage?

Kurt Francom:

I don't think so.

Gary Miller:

Yeah, so the cage stage is when you first in their community, when you first get a hold of proper reform doctrine, like tulip, like, you know, total depravity, unconditional election, whatever, and you, you first learn that stuff, you tend to want to go out and try to blast it all over everybody all the time, right? Just tell the world, and you're so new that you're well-intentioned, but you can kind of hurt yourself or hurt others or mess up the whole process because you're talking too soon. And it's kind of mucking everything up. And so I would say in my case, even though I think the reason I started recording early was because I came from a cadence of preaching three times a week, and I needed to teach. I didn't know what it was like to not. This whole sit in the back and you might get called on once every 6 months or something. What is that? I'm used to Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, you're preaching 50 minutes a hit every week, month over month. And so I was just used to that. So coming into the podcast space right away was really part of it was self-preservation, because I needed to keep my chops up. You don't use it, you lose it. And so I wanted to make sure that I kept my preaching cadence up. But early on, I would say, stay out of the side of it that is, hey, we got this guy about his conversion story. Because as well-intentioned as that is, and I believe every show I was on and interviewed on, especially this one, you know, I love your stuff. So that's easy. I think everyone was well-intentioned, but I think it makes the focus of what's happening on the wrong thing in some ways. I think that is ultimately a pretty deeply personal experience that probably needs more solitude, reflection, and contemplation, and less syndication, sharing, and retweeting. Yeah. I think that's a thing that you – and also, I've said, whether you were coming this way into becoming a Latter-day Saint or you were becoming a traditional Latin mass Catholic, whatever, you're going to have to take some time to learn what that means to be that week over week. It's very hard and you just have to – it's not that you need to sit in silence, but I do think you need to – you just have to learn the rhythm so that you can assess it a little bit more accurately. I think early on, I was certainly more critical of some of the cultural stuff. I still have plenty of criticism about that. But I reserve that for different settings and for different kind of things. I reserve that for conversations with my wife or the secret place of prayer or reflection. And then I start trying

to figure out what is the little difference or a little wave that I can make in it positively. Part of it, I think, is some weird form of penance, frankly, that I have to deal with some of that stuff that drives me crazy and somehow I've got to navigate it without losing my mind. But yeah, that's what I think. Early on, what would I do differently? I would be a little quieter early to kind of assess and let it start sinking in what's happening. Because there's going to be so much new that's going on. And part of that new is great. Part of that new is weird. Part of the new is just like, what? And I think those reactions, those experiences are better dealt with in the classroom of silence than in the echo chamber noise capital of social media or podcasts.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And it's tricky because I would imagine on one side you have the community that sort of feels like you're abandoning them or you're leaving them, right? Your Baptist traditional Christian community. And so you don't want to keep them in the dark about what's happening. And then you have this new faith you're coming into where you're excited about, you want to learn, you want to make connections. But what I'm picking up, what you're saying is like making it a little bit quieter or more private of an experience than, I don't know. I mean, because I guess you don't want to fool the people who think you're still just going to the Baptist church and you're doing the thing, right? So it's tricky though, right? Because you can't, it needs to be somewhat of a private now paced experience.

Gary Miller:

Yeah, I think everybody's going to have to find their own balance with that. I don't think about it as much now because obviously, I've got more foundation under me now after five years of this thing. I think I've at least got a basic sense of where to stand and where to sit and who's who and what's what. I've gotten most of the terms down, right? But yeah, I just, as I reflect back on it, as if I'm being sort of in my, trying to be in my best thinking, I would just say slow down and really kind of take all that in. I would also say that to anybody who's in investigator mode. I know that's counterintuitive advice. I would say slow down. There's a natural inertia and a real seduction that kind of lets go, go, go, go, go. I think that the answer is to slow things down. Not to delay or not to dabble, but I think to kind of take it in and be intentional. One of my concerns in my own life is that I'm so kind of chronically fast moving and high strung and, you know, kind of always at it, that I'm not as intentional as I would like to be. And I think in my best moments, I'm intentional. In my worst moments, I'm fast, fast to react, fast to judge, fast to respond, fast to, you know, And so yeah, and this conversion thing and how you do that early, I'm not suggesting we all need to go be monastics and like live out in a cabin and, you know, sherd butter and, you know, go on silent retreats for months. But I do think there's something to let me just learn what it means to be part of this thing for better or worse, there's going to be both. And then let me take stock six to 12 months later. And those are arbitrary numbers, I get it. But let me take some stock later and go, okay, where are we? All right, how do I feel about this? And move on from There.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. The word that stood out to me as you were talking there is this concept of having a foundation, where you had a conversion early on, but there maybe wasn't a foundation to really drill into. There's maybe a lot of whiplash going on, like, wait a minute, what just happened? I don't get it. You still have to be perceived as like, no, but you're in now. You shouldn't have a problem with this.

Gary Miller:

We should stop the notion that Oh, you're in now. So we believe all this stuff, right? And we just not know that. Yeah, I'm in now means that whatever in means, I don't even know what that means. I mean, that's so subjective, but people are going to pick this stuff up at different paces. And the notion that there's any of us that are sitting here and go, yep, I've got it now. Like all of it, really, you've got all of it and you love all of it and you believe all of it. That's crazy. No, you don't be more reflective, be more honest and say, no, there's a bunch of things I do believe there's some things that I'll put on the shelf of eventually, hopefully. And then there's some stuff that you go, no, I just I don't buy that. But I've got enough over here in the bank account balance of belief. that it's bigger than the stuff that I go, I just don't buy that. There are things that I don't buy. I mean, I still don't sign off on and I haven't been particularly convinced theologically or otherwise to go, yeah, that's oh, amen. But they're not so many or big that it stops me from continuing to progress. And I think that's something all of us can kind of reflect on. Sorry, I didn't mean to step on you There.

Kurt Francom:

No, that's great. And that's what I was getting after. I'm just curious if there, like when you talk about that foundation or Maybe there's a specific example of that journey of early on, you were like, man, I have a hard time sitting with this, but now it's like I've gotten there. Does anything specific come to mind that you'd want to share?

Gary Miller:

Well, naturally, the first thing that comes to mind is any and all things Temple, which I don't want to get on a big old conversation about that. That's not the purpose of this, but I think that what frustrated me for the longest time, early in the beginning of it, it was I couldn't make scriptural sense out of what these folks were talking about. Because I'm going chapter and verse people. I mean, I'm an independent fundamental Baptist guy, right? So we're chapter and verse on everything. It's very simple, like, chapter and verse. And they're like, well, you know, I was getting a lot of ish. And then so that was ish was frustrating.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah.

Gary Miller:

Then we moved from ish to the messaging was often kind of mysterious and woo. It was like, when I go to the temple, I just feel, and there's a lot of feeling talk. I'm like, okay, I have no doubt that you feel things, but this is a very large chasm I'm trying to get across here, and feelings are not helping me get across the gap from where I'm going to where we want to go. And then it finally, I think what really pushed that over the top for us foundationally was, I remember I'd finished teaching something. It might have been on a podcast or might have just been a family home evening with kids and stuff. And I remember saying to Crystal, you know, there's this huge percentage of the Latter-day Saint experience that revolves around the temple that we still haven't even been in. And it would seem to me, if we're going to make a bunch of larger judgments or have some opinions about all this, I think we need all the data before we can really effectively do that. We're missing a whole ton of data because we've never been to this place and done all this stuff. And so, it was much more... Then when I made it practical like that, I was like, okay, well, I can make some logical sense of this. We the best thing someone did for me. So take notes, anybody who's listening to this, if you got anybody that's either hesitant about temple stuff, or hasn't been in a while or whatever, like, this was the best thing our, our area 70 took myself and my wife, and his wife, and we went up to visit the temple. Because we obviously had to recommend we could go in, but they took us in and we got to meet the temple president and we got to walk around and see baptistry and the basic inside of the lobby and where things were, the basic stuff that we could see. And just having those conversations in the building, in a little chapel off from the entrance, I was like, okay, all right. A, someone's talking to me and it's not mysticism. B, somebody briefed them because they use some scripture when they talk to me. I'm like, all right, excellent. And there was a personal connection And so now, when you can marry theology, and the more, you know, the scripture dense stuff and heavy topics, with a personal connection with real people, then I think you've formed an interesting foundation that you can do business on. And what a week later, we were in the temple. And two weeks after that, we were sealed, and then you know, off and running. So foundationally, I think, for us, what worked As an example, you asked for one with the temple is just simply marrying together all the scripture stuff that we're so passionate about, but getting connected with people that were just speaking in a normal way. I mean, you know this. I mean, you've been around the block a lot longer than I have in this world. People have a funny way of just talking, really just making things weird when they don't need to be weird. Are you with me? Do you know what I'm talking about? I mean, don't make it weird. You could just have a normal conversation with somebody and man, what is it? I mean, one of the apostles for Cried Out Loud was, you know, talks about what is it, normal and natural ways, right? When you're extending invitations, right? We talk about, you know, inviting people, well, just talk normal, just talk natural, like regular stuff, that will help build that foundation and overcomes a lot of obstacles. I mean, what scripture says, love covers a multitude of sins, right? Love covers a multitude of weird, like you don't have to make it weird. Just have those conversations. They create a foundation and off you go.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And does it know that I expect you to sort of unpack a sermon on on temple with scripture and verse, but sure. Curious, like, like, what did Deacon unpack that a little bit more for us as far as what were some of those connections that sort of made the temple like a maybe more of a

logical thing to do rather than just some mystical thing or? getting into a place where you're like, okay, I can lean in.

Gary Miller:

Yeah, I well, I think, so I spent a lot of time back in the day in my, you know, academic pursuits, as a guy starting a church plant, studying the Old Testament, like, sort of formally, right. And if you spend any time doing that, and then you want to talk about something like the endowment, you're going to be able to put some things together there in a way that is not some giant breach. I would just say that it started clicking for me. Again, I think it started with people having a normal conversation with me about it. It's my passion now, one of my hidden passions, I guess. If I ever get the opportunity to talk to somebody who's never been who's like working or like trying to figure out how to go. Like, my mission is just to talk normal about it. Like as normal and as simple as I can, that works so much better. But yeah, I think my background in Old Testament stuff, super helpful. And then the people that I was doing this with, I have an amazing temple president who every other word out of his mouth when I was meeting with him in his office was Jesus. I'm like, we're home. Like you make this thing about Jesus, I'll come to the top of the building and just do whatever you want me to do. Like, if you make it about a bunch of other things, you're probably going to lose me if it doesn't bring us home. And I mean, look, I just recently taught this at our Saturday session at a stake conference, you know, look, the Book of Mormon is a Jesus book. The temple is a Jesus place. That's it. Like you're like, well, what? Well, what about that? I'm like, no, no, no, no, no, that's it. What's the Book of Mormon? It's a Jesus book. What's the temple? It's a Jesus place. If you get that straight, you're good.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Yeah. Each is their own Testament of Jesus Christ, right? One says it on the front of the book. The other says it outside the building. The holiness to the Lord. That's it. Yeah. That's powerful. That's really good. And I think I remember my nephew going through, you know, before his mission and greeting him in the celestial room and I said the simplest thing I could say was, you're now married to Jesus. You've had a ceremony that connects you to him on a more personal level and on a more committed level. Just like I did so with my marriage, the reason I went through a marriage ceremony, apart from the temple and sealing, was I wanted to show that I'm in a deeper relationship with my wife. Now you are in a deeper relationship with Jesus. That's beautiful rather than, and I get what you're saying. Sometimes we go to this place of like, you get power from the temple and your life goes better. And it's like, well, what do you mean? Like, where do those points meet? You know, what does that look like? Or when there's maybe better ways to just talk straightforwardly about it.

Gary Miller:

Absolutely. I think often we – a lot of people I've talked to about it, about the temple. It's just frankly, it's kind of oversold on the wrong benefits in my view. Like you were saying, it's – and again, I can't step into what someone's personal experience is. So maybe they did have seven angels visit them in the hallway or whatever. That's quite possible. I don't know. But what I can

say is that, yeah, I just think the way we message things is a larger conversation that is important. And when I say message things, just how we talk about this stuff. I'm kind of secretly on this mission to, if I'm talking to folks about the faith and about this stuff, I want it to be A, focused on Jesus. B, I want it to be super simple. And see, I don't want to oversell it. I think we need to allow the Holy Spirit to do the work on people's hearts. We don't have to convince or twist or embellish. And again, when people may or may not do that, I don't think they're doing it from a bad place. that it's not helpful. It sometimes is part of that cultural language stuff, right? It's sort of part of the tropes that we all say, you know, whatever the pat line is. And I get every cultural in every organization has its tropes. It's part of the script, right? I understand. But I don't think that's really helpful in the work of discipleship in house. And I don't think it's helpful at all in the work of evangelism. So I just think if we really look at If we just take the New Testament, pop it out and look at these very simple core messages, I think we can stick to that and we'll be fine in terms of how we message. But often, I think some of my biggest frustrations you were talking about, going back to the beginning, what has been challenging or how would you change it? Well, I would say at least half of every frustration I've had has been about messaging. And so, you know, just how we're talking, I'm like, what are you talking about? Like, and so I'm on this quest in my own life, because that's the only life I can, you know, work on is that's, you know, just how do I message in a way that is authentic and simple and Jesus focused? Because unfortunately, we're just talking about the temple. I mean, So often, well-intentioned people who I know love the Lord would talk to me about 17 things about the temple and nowhere out of their mouth did I hear Jesus. And I'm like, this is going to be a problem for me. So, you know, I think we just need to be careful.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, I often say it's one thing to believe the gospel, but it's a whole nother thing to be able to articulate the gospel, right, in a way that's really hopeful. Right. And you're right on that. It can be that messaging there. So, I mean, if let's say you run into one of your old Baptist friends and you're like, hey, great that you're on this path, but like, man, what's with the temple? Like, why so much focus on the temple? Like, is there a way not to put you on the spot here? But I am. I mean, how would you articulate that? How would you message that to maybe someone outside our faith that's still Christian?

Gary Miller:

Yeah, I mean, if someone wanted to ask about, you know, what's up with the Templar? Why do you go? My answer would probably be super simple. I would just say I am always interested in getting an opportunity to visit with Jesus in a way that connects me not just to the person of Jesus, but to the principles of Jesus. Because I think those are two very different things. I think they're both really important. where I come from, you know, a lot about the person of Jesus, the work of salvation, eternal security of the believer, etc. But the principles of Jesus are really, really important. If you love me, you'll do what? You'll believe in me. No, that's not what it says. It says you'll keep my commandments. And I'm, you're going to have to get these principles right. So I'm very interested in the person and the principles of Jesus. And I can't, if we're talking about a physical get up and go and have sort of high church, the temple is the place to do that.

The temples really are, I don't know if you've ever been to a proper Latin mass. Have you ever been to like a high mass, like Latin mass?

Kurt Francom:

I've been to a few Catholic funerals where, you know, there's some.

Gary Miller:

We need to get you to a Latin mass. It's impressive. But the point is, is like you go there, that's high church for them, right? This is like proper ceremonial ritual, like we're not messing around, right?

Kurt Francom:

Yeah.

Gary Miller:

I'm not saying these things are equivalent. They're different and great in their own ways. The point is that when we go there, we're moving from low church, and that's not a negative thing. That's week over week sitting in your ward, which is graphically vanilla. There's not a lot on the walls. It's all very simple. You're moving into a place that even visually, the moment you walk up, you know, we're now entering into a different space. and your entire worship posture changes, your orientation changes. Nobody needs to tell you to whisper when you walk in there. You just know that you're in a different place, right? There isn't a sign. You walk in, you know. And so I would just say to that person again, yeah, I want to go to a place where I can learn about the principles and the person of Jesus. I'm going to do that in a way that is sort of high church. I want to experience something that is not every day. And you don't go to the temple every day, I guess, unless you work there. I mean, I don't go to the temple every day. It's something that you go and you do and you know you're doing business with God in a different way. And that's very interesting.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And that really, I feel like just from my own experience in observing human nature, like that does something for the human psyche of, you know, God could have come to Moses in a tent where he sleeps and just says, Hey, I've got some things to teach you. But just that place of move, like physically going to a place that's closer to it, it shifts the dynamic in a way that's really important, right? To go to high church.

Gary Miller:

Yeah, it's an important part of the idea of worship. I think when you're going, you have to get in the car, go. You might wear some different things than you normally wear. You might do some things that you don't normally do. This is putting us in an environment and in a posture of

worship. That is not a casual experience. Much of what we do as Christians in general can be remarkably casual, can be sort of redundant and day by day monotonous, you're just checking stuff and we all can fall into this. When we have to go and kind of do when we get to go and do this thing, it's a it's a different experience. We're moving from a sort of casual or yeah, you know, and now we're moving into a place where all right. Like, we're not again, I use a very simple thing. We're just we're not messing around now. Like, you come out of the and I'm not revealing anything here that I shouldn't. I mean, you, you come out of the changing room, it's on, like, yeah, we're not messing around. Yeah, like, so that's it. There's something to that. There's a gravity to that, that has some weight to it. That gives our frankly gives our theology gives our experience a little bit more teeth. It's not so just vague or, you know, just kind of, again, the normal stuff. It gives it some heft that I think is useful in a walk every day and every week where all of us are parents or married or have kids or dogs or cats or Collins or whatever, you need all the help that you can get. And sometimes you got to go to, you know, a really serious place to get serious help. And so that's a good place to go to get it.

Kurt Francom:

Anything else about the temple that you want to make sure we mention?

Gary Miller:

I'm totally the least qualified person to talk about the temple. It took me four years to get there. So every other guest that you've ever had knows more. I just happen to, that it is centrally a Jesus place. And if nothing else, get in the door and find a place to sit anywhere, and you're going to encounter Jesus in a very unique way. That would be my best counsel.

Kurt Francom:

I love it. I love it. You alluded to your calling. What's your current calling right now? I'm part of the stake high council. Nice. How long has that been going on? Four months. Oh, nice. And maybe I haven't got so many questions. What has been some of the different callings you've had over the last five years?

Gary Miller:

None that were very, I didn't have a lot of callings at all. I mean, truthfully, early on, I did some stuff with super young, and so not primary, but somewhere in between. Like the nursery? No, not the nursery. It was like somewhere Yeah, like it was, well, no, it was primary, I guess, but I was teaching, I was co-teaching, you know, doing that kind of thing. And then I was like an assistant ward mission leader for about half a second. And then I was a stake council.

Kurt Francom:

Cool. And when I go back like early on, like I was, you know, I love the different episodes and the content that you created online. And it was definitely like an avenue for you to release some of that pent up, you know, pastoral energy that you had to share the gospel and get it into the

book, right? And so, I don't know how else you would do that, like, right? I mean, it's hard to just put that away in this new journey. So, I mean, but would you still do it that way?

Gary Miller:

Well, I can tell you, I mean, in the last two weeks, I've probably produced 12 new episodes of preaching. So, I mean, I preach at a very rapid cadence still. And I do that because one, I think I have heard from a lot of people over the last five years that appreciate a more maybe animated style of preaching the Bible. And all that is, is just me doing like, this isn't horrible self-promotion here. Here's the point. So like, one line of my teaching is the Hope in Him Today podcast, right? So you know about that. I just re put that back online like three weeks ago. And that is just line by line Bible teaching. So if you closed your eyes, and you didn't know about any of this, you just be like, Oh, yeah, Pastor Mel was preaching. So it's cool. Like anybody can come there and it's safe place and they're not going to hear anything weird. And it's, you know, that's just Bible teaching. all day long.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah.

Gary Miller:

I'll send you a link, Kurt. You should leave me a review or something. Good grief. So, so yeah, that's that side. The other side is I do a podcast called Outside the Lane, which is, you know, faith beyond our own kind of tradition. So I'm, we're learning from charismatics and Catholics and Muslims and all kinds of people. And it's fantastic because I love those conversations because I'm, I get very concerned when any of us think we own the franchise on God. That makes me very, very nervous. So, in either one of those, I'm recording still three or four episodes a week, just because people have reached out and have said they appreciate the style and they appreciate the directness of that and it encourages them and motivates them. But I've had to, I mean, I've certainly had to refine that a bit over the years. And I have a big old fat disclaimer, obviously, on my podcast now that's like, Look, I'm, I'm not endorsed by anybody. I'm not endorsing anybody. This is just one guy talking about Jesus. Hit play at your own peril. I know, you know, you're at risk. Most importantly, the scriptures, the secret place of prayer and being connected to a local church community is much more important than a podcast. So use this as a supplement, not as the main thing. I say it every single episode. And so that helps me kind of balance it so that, you know, I don't confuse myself thinking I'm still the pastor of the Narrogate Baptist Church. But it also allows me to teach in a way that keeps my chops up. And I'm always excited to talk about the scripture. So yeah.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Do you find yourself more and more like, I mean, do you feel more and more comfortable with like Book of Mormon scripture, Doctrine and Covenants type of stuff that you work that in? Or do you try and just keep this more just traditional Christian?

Gary Miller:

Now, on Hope and Him, I just teach Bible stuff. I used to teach a ton of Book of Mormon stuff. But I think for what is interesting to me, over on Outside the Lane, obviously, I talk about the Book of Mormon, I talk about all kinds of scriptures. I mean, I've spent the last year and a half, for example, really studying the Quran, for example. And so I love talking about that stuff over there. So outside the lane, you'll hear about more of that kind of stuff. Over on Hope and Him, I just think that it's – I also – it's weird, Kurt. So here's the thing. If you start talking Book of Mormon D&C, it's the funniest thing. I've been preaching Bible online, like podcasts and stuff since like the first days of Narragate, right? The church. And I, I never would hear from people like much about like, I would never get the but also emails who I heard you preaching, but you know, also that verse could be in this or whatever. The moment I would put up Book of Mormon or DNC stuff, like I would get so many emails and stuff about like, well, you know, this could also mean this, or you're bringing a little too much of your Baptist into this. I'm like, well, maybe you need some more of my Baptist, you know, like, I mean, so I just said, we're going to kind of partition these in a way so that it will make it easier if people want to take in that stuff. That's more again, DNC or Book of Mormon, particularly, which I have a just love and have been reading every day for years. I have no problem talking about that on Outside the Lane, just over in Hoping Him. I keep it more biblically centric just to kind of divide those things up a little bit, but it's not. You talk to me any day of the week. If you want me to teach Book of Mormon, you could drop me in front of anybody. We'll sling it.

Kurt Francom:

That's not a problem. What's the experience been like just on the high council? I assume you speak a lot more in different words in your stake.

Gary Miller:

Yeah, I do, which I'm very grateful for. I mean, I think that was one of the things that I serve under a really good stake president. And so he was very understanding of the dilemma that I'm like, man, I'm used to preaching a lot. So he was, he got that. And so I do get to speak a lot more. And so I'm, again, grateful for that. And it's so interesting as you visit different wards to see, certainly how similar they are, but how different they can be as well. The view from up there when you're sitting there waiting to go up. I mean, just from the way people sing hymns is so radically different word to word. I don't know if that is in your world out there, maybe Utah or whatever is different. But it's wild. Like I'll be sitting in one and everybody's like super reserved. I'm like, I mean, you could light a bomb off in the thing and nobody would move. And then you got others, man. I mean, literally first word, first verse, that organ kicks. And I mean, they're full throated singing. I'm like, all right now. All right, all God's people said, Amen, and we're preaching now. I mean, they're fired up. And I love that. Because I mean, look, if I look, this is preacher school one on one, half of the effectiveness of your sermons and your teaching has to do with how good the crowd is. Like if you're teaching to a dead crowd, you can have the best message in the world. It doesn't matter. You can be in front of a crowd that's really engaged and lit up and fired up. You can preach a message that's not even half as good. And I mean, it'll just

hit. And so, I mean, it's a cool experience for me because I've had the opportunity to teach in front of rooms that are a little bit more subdued, which is a struggle because I'm like, man, shout it. But then there are others. It's funny. I'll be up there and I'll be in the middle of teaching. Every other paragraph, I'll be up there shouting, Amen. And I'll hear somebody to my left and the bishop going, Amen. I'm like, all right, that's right. So you can tell there's There's just differences in different places. And that's cool. I think this church in general is a lot more diverse than we like to admit or that we showcase. There's a lot of different kind of believers in this place. And I wish we could hear from more of them, because I think sometimes we all try to be the same kind of believer. I don't think that's what this where this church shines. I think this church shines when you see the different kind of believers and the people that are in the back and the people that are sitting out in the foyer and the man, there's some really interesting and talented and fired up Jesus people. But I think sometimes they're trying so hard to conform to look like everybody else that they're missing their message and all of us are missing their message. We could learn a lot from those folks. And so, yeah, it's cool getting the chance to go to different places because you definitely see not all wards are the same and in terms of their energy and their culture, but you know, Jesus finds his way to every one of them. So it's good.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Do you feel like when you're speaking as a high councilor, do you feel like you're back in the saddle of preaching or do you shift your cadence a little bit just because of the nature of that setting?

Gary Miller:

I've had to really tone it down. I mean, I do tone it down to a certain degree. I mean, it depends on the room. I think, you know, for those of us that have had to sit, you know, sat up there and gotten up to preach every week for a long time, you can kind of read a room. I mean, you kind of know what you can kind of push and what you can. And I would say, yeah, I start my outlines, let's say on a Monday. I always want to have it done by Wednesday, because then I'll just rep it for the next three days. I'll just practice it to make sure it's really, really solid by Sunday. And so my messages on Monday still start like Pastor Miller, and they end the week at High Council. So it downshifts through the week, because I'll start it and I'll preach it. And Crystal's like, Oh man, that's what I'm talking about. She's like, preach that. And then I'll come off, and she happens to be listening to me on Sunday, and she'll go, you cut out so much. She's like, you were too calm. And so, you want to listen. I learned from one of my favorite pastors, preachers, a guy named Brian Branham. He's amazing. I learned early on from him, listen, you preach to the room that you're in, and you want to honor where they are. And so if they're cooler and chill and not real, you know, boisterous, then don't go in there and try to plow through them, you know, try to speak in a language they understand and at a tempo and a pace they understand. But conversely, if you're in a place where they are, and I just I tell it by the hymns, I mean, if I'm getting knocked over by your first hymn, I know we're in business and I know I can come up there and be a lot looser with you and I can hit the pulpit a little harder and I can do that. But I think what's been great and I really appreciate is no one has asked me to change my style or delivery or any of that. I just think I always want to be prayerful about it. Let me make sure that

I'm preaching the word. Let me make sure I'm not preaching my flesh. And as another one of my favorite preachers, Tony Hudson, used to say, every time he'd get up to pray before he'd preach, he'd say, Father, in the name of Jesus, I stand where flesh has failed me. And so I'm the same way. My flesh will fail me if I'm up there on my own. And so I always want to honor it, but I've been very grateful no one's asked me to tone it down or anything, because I want to make sure that I do honor what we're doing there. I wish we preached harder and I wish we would sling it harder. And that's true. I've never hidden that. But at the same time, you know, I've got an opportunity to to convey a message. And I pretty frequently will get messages from random people who look me up on the tools or something, who heard me talk and and who have something that hit them that day. And then I'm fine with that. And if I want to really shout and sling it, that's why I have a podcast. So you can go on there and go crazy.

Kurt Francom:

But yeah, I'm glad you have a venue There.

Gary Miller:

you want to honor where you are. And I always want to be real careful with that. But at the same time, they didn't necessarily call me because I was quiet. They knew what they were getting when they called me. And I told them that. I remember Crystal and I sitting in that first conversation with our stake president. I said, look, you do know what we're doing here, right? I mean, you're familiar with us and what we do. We're not disrespectful by any means, but we're some of these folks are a little bit more country. We're a little bit more rock and roll, right? I mean, like, You just got to know that." And he did. And so we just always pray. I mean, I think the best advice for anybody, obviously, be scripturally prepared, use the Word a lot, let the Spirit guide, but just pray before you teach. Just make sure you sit in your car a few more extra minutes and go, you know, look, Lord, if there's something I need to stay away from today, would you help me to see that? And if I need to throttle it up, would you tell me to do that too?" And he will. He's always faithful. And I was just, man, I just think if Jesus were on the front row, or if President Nelson were in the front row, would I be comfortable sitting down after what I preached? And I always have been. And so if I can do that, I'm just fine.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, that's awesome. Well, Gary, this is, this is great. So fun to connect with you like this again, and hear about your journey and learn from it. Any other point principle story that you want to make sure we squeeze in here? How did we do?

Gary Miller:

I think we did great. I mean, you're, you're awesome, man. And I'm so grateful for what you do. And I mean that that's not just podcast host to podcast host. you know, giving you props. Now, I, you've been a good friend to me and, and have listened and what, and I would say the reason is because you just listened to me over the years without, well, listen and not judge, I guess is the trend on social media. So yeah, you, you, you've listened and, and not judged. I would just leave this thing with a, with sort of my simple testimony. Right. And that, when I think about stories in this journey, I always come back to kind of the same three things. Number one, I believe we serve a God of miracles. I think the Book of Mormon says it beautifully. I think it's all throughout Scripture, but I always love that you can go to Mormon 9:11. So 9-1-1 is the emergency. The verse is, you know, we serve a God of miracles. So we serve a God of miracles. And so if anybody's listening to us, if God did something in the scripture for somebody that really broke through for them and created a miracle, if he did it for somebody, he can do it for you. He can do it for me. How he does that and when he does it, I don't know. But I believe we serve a God of miracles too. I'm convinced that Jesus knows your name. I know he knows your name. So wherever you are and whatever is happening, I know he sees you and I know that he is very aware of what's happening. You are not alone. You might think you are, but you're definitely, definitely not alone. And the final thing is that we're on the winning side, Kurt. There's that old song we used to hear him sing in the Baptist world all the time. You know that we're on the winning side, and we are. Death, hell, and the grave were conquered by Jesus. So ultimately, this story ends well. You might be in a place right now where the story is not well, and I get it. There might be a lot more question marks in your faith journey right now than periods. I completely understand that. But we serve a God of miracles. He knows your name, and we are on the winning side. That's the best thing I could share with anybody.

Kurt Francom:

The end. That's it for this Leading Saints episode. I encourage you to check out some of the most popular episodes of the podcast that we list at the bottom of the show notes. If you haven't listened to all of those, do so now. Remember, up your teaching game by listening to the David Farnsworth presentation by visiting leadingsaints.org/slash/14.

Elder Gordon B. Hinckley:

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. 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. A loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.