

## 051 Youth Fireside

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Well, greetings from Arizona. When I tell you I'm from Arizona people say, "oh, this must really be cold for you to be here in Missouri in January. But we live 7,000 feet up in the mountains in Arizona, and when we left the other morning it was 11 degrees with six inches of snow on the ground. So how's that for Arizona.

I view Missouri as sacred ground. I am a student of Church history and I have taught it for years and years and I know the stories. I was going over with Randal and Marley today about the battle of the Gallatin Square where the Mormons tried to come in and vote one day and were met with some opposition, about 10 to 1. And that started a whole series of events that led to us being in these favorable conditions, meeting in this beautiful chapel.

I've been asked to speak about that scripture in 1 Timothy 4:12, that was quoted by Randall, "Be thou an example of the believer."

I have a friend that taught me a little saying that says, "How can we find them if we look so much like them?" "How will they know who we are if we look so much like them?"

Think about that for just a minute.

In the Doctrine and Covenants it says there are many out there who are kept from the truth because simply don't know where to find it. As Latter-day Saints we have to be peculiar. I know we don't want to stand out; it goes against our nature to be a light in a crowd, but we have to be peculiar. You have to be different. That's the word the Lord uses, that's not my word, that's his word – peculiar. And as the world continues to spiral downward, which it is, the people who are the honest and true and honorable men and women of the earth need to be able to look somewhere where they can find the light that shines in darkness. So more and more as this continues towards the coming of our Savior – we belong to a church called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, see, and in order for us to fit the commission that's been given to us, you're going to be required to stand out. You're going to have to be different. Now, there's a way to do that and there's a way not to do that.

So the Lord says in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon, "Be bold, but not what?" "Overbearing." So there's a fine little razor's edge there isn't there? Sometimes in our zealousness we want to stand up and declare with all the fervor we can instead of making friends, it ends up that we distance ourselves from those who are looking for the truth.

Sister Stroud and I have had some opportunities to serve some missions together. It's been a great experiences as we have served two years in Mongolia. You think you've got it cold here? In Mongolia we would walk from our apartment to the service center which was the Church's headquarters, which was about a 5-6 minute walk, and we would do it in 40-below-zero weather and we would have everything on our faces covered except a little slit right here. Sister Stroud had shoes that when she went to Mongolia, the Mongolian's would stop her, and we couldn't understand their language, and they would point to her feet and indicate she needed to cover her feet up. So by the time we would get to the Service Center we would have icicles hanging from our eyebrows, literally! Because your breath would come up from here and by the time it collected up here you would have icicles hanging on your eyebrows. R-e-a-l-l-y cold weather.

And then we got called to our second mission; we went to the Philippines. Now you want to talk about extremes? I had a rash on me for 18 months and I couldn't get rid of there. It's just amazing. So we went from one of the coldest capitals on the face of the earth, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, into the Philippines. There you didn't take suit coats, you wore sandals, and we traipsed around in the jungle. So we went to these great extremes.

When we put in our papers for our third mission, I am an adventuresome soul, so I kind of like to get out there and pioneer, and I thought Mongolia, isn't that great, talk about pioneering. The Philippines is okay; the church has been

there for 60 years, but that's okay. So I was really expecting a call to go to some developing nation or to Germany. Because every time I went on these missions I brushed up on my German. I just knew because I was a German speaker I was going to be called to go back to Germany. (speaks some German that I can't understand) You see, I can still speak it. So we got called on our third mission to New Jersey. Now that's a foreign country! And it has its own language, right?

So we had some great experiences together and have seen all kinds of things. I know some of you have traveled the world and you've seen some of the things we have.

When I came back from Mongolia, there's an old cowboy in our town, and I hadn't seen these people for 2 years and we were down at Safeway buying some food - we had just barely gotten home - and we went to Safeway to stock the refrigerator and this old cowboy that was there, we bumped into him at Safeway and he came up to us and he said, "You're back!"

And I said, "Yes."

His next comment was this, "We have no idea, do we."

And I said, "No you don't. And I don't know how to explain it to you - of what it's like out there; what's going on. It's wonderful, and it's also stunning, and also saddening at the same time. We have seen so much."

What I would like to talk to you about tonight, Brothers and Sisters, is how to stay happy. And you stay happy when you follow the Lord and learn to listen to and obey His Spirit. All we need to do to be happy in this life is learn to follow the Spirit of the Lord, and recognize it.

You know, President Hinckley gave an interesting talk in General Conference - I think it was about 1995-1996. And he gave three things that we can do, that every member of the Church can do (and he is speaking to new members), how do we get people that have come into the Church - how do we get them to stay in the Church? How do we get them to stay active? How do we get them to be believers and stay believers? And he gave three things. Now, all over the world I have talked about these three things, and it's interesting to me that everywhere people can remember two, but I've only met one person in ten years that could remember the third thing.

I sat with the Mission President in the office in the Mission Home in [Cebu] and we were called on an MLS mission in the Philippines, that's a Member Leader Support, and our job was to go out and talk to members of the church who for one reason or another were not actively involved in church anymore. The Mission President said, "How do we get them back; how do we keep them from leaving?"

How do we keep members from leaving church activity? They can't be an example of the believer if they're not involved with the membership of the church and activity. How do you do that? You have to come into the church to make some covenants. You have to come into the church to partake of the Sacrament. The church is a great schoolhouse that teaches us the things we need to know in order to be successful in this life. And we have far too many who make the decision to leave. How do we do that?

So President Hinckley came up with three things - are you thinking what they are? I'll bet most of you can come up with two. Let me see right now how many of you know all three of the things that President Hinckley gave? [a few raised their hands] Mike: "Good! Give them to me, Bishop."

Bishop: You need a friend.

Mike: Everybody needs a friend.

Bishop: The responsibility of a calling.

Mike: Calling.

Bishop: To be nurtured by the good word of God.

Mike: Now that third one - that's the one that's missing everywhere across the board.

I'm impressed. I'm impressed! Did you know all three (Mike asks people in the audience). Did you know all three over here? Did you?

The third one, "to be nourished by the good word of God." That's the one that's missing. And across the board, the membership of the church can't get to the third one, and that's the we need to know about the most.

So over in 1 Nephi 15:24, Nephi had this great vision where he has re-seen his father's dream of the Tree of Life. And he is meeting with his brothers one more time and they are complaining and they are having all kinds of discussion, "we don't understand what our father says, it doesn't make sense to us, and we don't know if we believe it anyway.

And Nephi comes on the scene and they ask him (1 Nephi 15:23-24)

*23 What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw?"*

*24 And I said unto them that it was the word of God...*

Now watch this principle right here - think about what Bishop said "being nourished by the good word of God is the absolute key, young people and moms and dads - to success and happiness and making it through this probationary experience. Do you want to be happy in this life? Joseph Smith said, "It is the object and design of God that man should be happy." That's His object and design that His children should be happy. So Nephi goes on and he says this.)

*24... and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it,*

We will come back to that in a minute. When we read the scriptures we need to slow down and break it down; not be in a rush and try to get through the verses or our day's reading quota time. We need to slow down a little, especially in the Book of Mormon.

*24... and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it*

Look at the promise.

*24...they would never perish;*

Now think about that for just a minute. There's an adversary that wants you to leave church membership. He understands the covenants; he understands the Sacrament; he understands the doctrine; he understands the Priesthood leadership and the love and care that we need to have in church membership; he understands and wants to distance all of us from that. But look at this promise

*24... and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it they would never perish;*

That's not talking about physical death. That's talking about spiritually perishing. Everybody in here tonight knows somebody who is perishing spiritually for one reason or another, and they have left the source of happiness and the source of peace, which is what the gospel provides and the church administers those things. Look at the second promise. Promise #1 – they would never perish. Here's the second promise.

*24...neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction.*

Look at those two promises Brothers and Sisters. What a powerful scripture. If we will hearken unto the word of God and hold fast to it, you won't perish spiritually and the fiery darts of the adversary and the temptations won't overpower you. It doesn't say they won't have an effect on you; it doesn't say you won't come into contact with it; it just says you will be victorious of the encounter. You have to come into contact with these things – that's the purpose for being here in this life. It's when we come face-to-face with the enemy and withstand the onslaught and testify against him that you show your independence and your love and loyalty to God the Father and the Son. That's what you do. You have to do that. But you won't be overpowered.

So, what's he going to do to void those two promises? What he's going to do is do everything he can to take you away from the Word of God, the Iron Rod. What is that? What is the Word of God?

Well, first thing we run into is this (and this is a part of it, but this isn't all). President Benson said the Word of God can be divided into three categories:

- 1) Scriptures
- 2) Message of the prophets and apostles
- 3) Holy Spirit and personal revelation

President Benson likened it to an old three-legged milking stool. Some of you are old enough to know what those are, right? And he said if you take one of those legs off it becomes so unstable; if you take two of them off you're going to be one the ground or being kicked by the cow, one of the two. Right? You have to have all three of those things.

So let's talk that Word of God for just a minute. You want to be happy in this life and successful? You want to complete your sojourn here in this telestial schoolhouse? You want to make it successfully through? You're worried about helping others in your families. Some of you are worried about children, grandchildren, maybe a spouse. You can't do anything for them until you take care of you.

I was sitting in an in-service class as a seminary teacher and one of the men said this, "What's the best thing we can do for our students?" (We were always talking about this in in-service.) "What's the best thing we can do for our students?" And it went around and there was a discussion, "We can greet them at the door," "we can shake hands with them," "we can make sure we tell them we love them every day." (And these are all good things.) It went around for 4-5 minutes with a discussion with the in-service, and finally after everybody had listed these things on the board (and there were about 10 things you can do for your students). This man said, "The best thing you can do for your students is 'sanctify yourself.'"

Then he went on and said, "That's not only the best thing you can do for your students. It's the best thing you can do for your students, your children, your husband or wife, and everybody around you." How can you reach down and give a helping hand when you're not on higher ground?

So, the Word of God is found in the scriptures. And here's the Book of Mormon. In our day people are wanting physical evidence to prove the truth. You want something to believe in? Prove to me it is true. Well, here it is. You have physical evidence right here. You can hold it in your hands. You can turn its pages. You can read its words. And what's more, it has the only promise of a book in the world. There is no book in the world, of the all the billions of books in libraries,

there is no book anywhere that has a promise in it from God that if you will follow a three step formula, God will tell you personally that that book comes from Him. It's the only place you can go.

So, you want physical evidence of the restoration and the truth of the Book of Mormon. The adversary is going to do everything he can to keep us out of this book. Latter-day-saints, if we're not spending time in the Book of Mormon, every day, I'm going to make you a promise, you're not going to successfully complete this journey. The adversary knows that. He is going to do everything he can to keep you out of that.

Notice the catch word:

*24... and whoso would hearken unto...and would hold fast*

This isn't holding fast [visual demonstration]. That is not holding fast. [visual demonstration] That's holding fast.

Can I have somebody come up here? [called someone by name] Come up here for a second. I'm just going to cling on with all I've got. Now, pull it away from me. Okay. Now take it away. Okay. You get the message. You know what I am saying? Every day, we've got to be in that book. Every day. It's what God has given us.

Listen to what Joseph Smith said,

*"The Book of Mormon is the keystone to our religion."*

You know what keystones are? I won't go there. All of you who've had seminary have had little example of the stone, etc, etc.

*"A man/woman can get closer to God by reading that book and by abiding by its principles than by any other book."*

Think about that for a minute. Of all the books that are written on the earth, this one that you and I have, is physical evidence, proof.

Satan has been trying to discredit this book for 180 years. The people who don't like God and want to do damage to those who do, especially Latter-day Saints, will do anything they can to keep you out of this. They can't disprove it. They've been trying for 180 years. They can come at you in a lot of other different ways. These are people who don't want you to believe and have faith and be happy and successful in life. They don't want that. But they can't take this one. They've tried. There is no way that this can be disproved. And most of the people now who go after you don't use the Book of Mormon as a tool against you. They'll go after you with other things because you can't disprove this book.

So, Brothers and Sisters, let's get back to it. Let me give you a challenge. Start studying tomorrow. Take a little time each day and revisit the Book of Mormon. Kneel down before you do it, and say, "Heavenly Father, help me to understand what I am going to read today in such a way that it will clothe me in armor to fight this battle."

Because it's a battle, isn't it. The stakes are high. Get your soul involved in this.

So, the Book of Mormon is the Words of the Prophets. What can I say, we are so blessed to live in a day when apostles and prophets are on the earth.

Now I would like to speak to you about something that's a little more difficult to obtain and to nurture and to develop, and that is personal revelation. Because, when it is all said and done, section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants says - it's talking about the second coming of Christ - and it says:

D&C 45:

56 And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins.

57 For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day.

Let me share with you about personal revelation. In every one of us there are three voices competing for your attention. Three voices. One of them is the voice of the Spirit. You came into this world with it. It is a birthday gift. It's something that you have; it's called the Light of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Light of Truth, the Spirit of Truth. It has many names. It's not a person. It's an IT. It comes from God and it is Light and it teaches you right from wrong, light from darkness, truth from error. Everybody has that. When it speaks to you, you hear it in your mind in the form of a thought, or you hear it in your heart in the form of a feeling. It very seldom will speak in long sentences or will give reasons for the prompting it gives you. It simply says things like this:

“Go here,” “don't go there,” “do this,” “don't do that.”

Everybody has this. This is not the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost, if you listen to this Light (Brother Packer says in Preach My Gospel, pg 90) that this Light that everybody has, is not a person, is preparatory to a greater light called the Holy Ghost. If you will be obedient to, and hearken to that Light it will, by its very nature, take you to a greater light.

Your own voice is another voice. It's the voice you hear in your mind, it's the voice of your mind. This voice is always asking questions.

“What should I do,” “should I go here,” “should I do that.”

By its nature it's designed to ask questions because you have two other voices, the voice of the Lord which is the voice of Light and you have the voice of opposition, and they are trying to entice you and persuade you to follow them. And you stand in the middle and your mind is saying, “What should I do?” It's designed that way on purpose.

If the Holy Spirit tells you to do something that is right, immediately you will have another voice that will come up and give you ten reasons, really good reasons, as to why you should not do what that voice just prompted you to do. That's the opposing voice.

If you want to have happiness in this life and you want to be successful, you've got to learn to recognize these voices and follow them. Heed that one that says, “Go here.” If you will do that, it will lead you to a greater light that will fill in the blanks.

Let me give you an example of how this might work. Missionaries you will relate to this.

*You're out working in the neighborhood and a woman inside is ironing her clothes and she sees the Elders coming down the street with the black nametags and she says “I think I know who they are.” And all of the sudden they are knocking on her door.*

*And there is a voice that says, “Open the door.” (Just like that.)*

*And another voice comes in and says, “You don't have time,” “You're busy,” “You know who they are, they're the Mormons, you don't want them in here.” And it gives ten reasons why.*

*Now you stand in the middle and you do what? "Oh, my, what should I do?" "Should I let them in?" "Or shouldn't I?"*

*There's the point where you exercise your agency and make a decision on what you're going to do. So you listen to the little voice, "let them in," so you let them in. And they say (I know you can't do that when it's a woman, right?) So they say, "We want to give you a little message." On the doorstep they say, "Can we leave a little message with you?" We've come here with a message for you."*

*And that little voice says, "Listen to them."*

*And five or six on the other side say, "You don't have time," "the kids are screaming," "your husband's going to be in from work," "they are just after you," "maybe they are just looking for a wife, who knows." All this garbage.*

*But you make a decision to listen to them. One thing leads to another. You set up an appointment. You go back when you can teach the discussions and as you are teaching the discussion, another voice comes and says:*

*"It's true." "This was the right decision for you to make." "Listen to what they are saying."*

All of the sudden you are getting more information than just, "do this, don't do that." Now we are moving into the realm of the Holy Ghost, who testifies, who teaches, who fills in the blanks.

This first voice just simply says, "go here," "go there," "do this," "don't do that." It's a personal Liahona. It is a guide and a director. The Holy Ghost is something else. Now, the Holy Ghost starts to testify. And as you listen to that, and as you feel that testimony and that feeling that comes with the Holy Ghost, it builds, and is leading to a covenant. And if you'll listen to that, go all the way to the covenant, which is baptism, then you're going to have hands laid on your head and receive the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead.

Those are the three voices.

Sister Stroud and I had some experiences in the Philippines. We were going down the road one day and taking some missionaries to set up an apartment and I had a little pickup truck full of all kinds of things, and if you're from the Philippines you understand, you've probably helped a few missionaries move around. As we were going down the street, we came around the corner, having the Elders in the back and all this furniture, and we came around the corner and here is a young woman standing on the side of the road with a baby in her arms. And on the ground next to her is a stack of firewood. Now over there they have little bundles of firewood, and they do all their cooking, where we were, on open fires, so firewood was for sale. And as I went to pass her by. Sister Stroud said, "We need to stop and buy that firewood."

And I said, "I need to meet these missionaries here in about 10 minutes."

What did she say? "Stop and buy the wood." There was no reason for it, yet. She just said, "You need to stop and buy that wood." And I said, "but, but, but," "but, but, but."

We went down the road and she said this, "She needs that wood for sale so she can buy food for her baby." Now you are in the realm of the Holy Ghost, because the first message didn't get through to me. By that time I am down the road a mile, and rather than turn around and go back, I said, "I'll tell you what, we'll stop on the way back." You can see who the inspired person is in our companionship can't you; who listens to the Spirit.

So we went and did our business with the missionaries and turned around and came back and got to the point, and I knew right where it was, and this gal was gone, but the little bundle of sticks was still sitting in the road. By this time I am feeling pretty bad, like I have really blown an opportunity here, right? But I learning. So, we had two missionaries with us and there was a little village off to the side, down in the jungle, and there is a steep hill that went up the side, so we sent the missionaries. We stopped where the wood was, and I said to the two Elders who could speak the language, "Go down there and see if you can find the lady that owns that wood."

They went down there and talked to the people and when they came back they said, "Elder Stroud, they don't know anything." So, as they got in the car and we started to go, right across the street was a little trail that went up this hill. Sister Stroud said, "She lives up there."

Here, I said, "How do you know that?"

She said, "I think she lives up there."

And I said, "Well, it's getting late and we tried." And we drove off.

Instead of hiking up there and looking, I just said, "I tried, at least my intentions were good."

That is an example of learning to listen. We made up our minds that from that point on whenever we have any prompting or any impression like that, we were going to stop whatever we were doing and go and follow up on that impression. We were going to do that. And I have tried to do that.

Let me give you another example. I'm getting better at this. Okay. But she's still my mentor, and better at following the Spirit. I train horses and I've had horses and ridden horses almost all my life. I'm an Arizona cowboy. I know how to move cows and do those kinds of things, all right? And I had this palomino horse that I was training and he was young gelding, and was pretty well trained but he didn't like to cross water. So I was working with him to get him to cross water. I was riding up in the \*\*\*\* wilderness at about 7,000 or 8,000 feet and we came across this little trickle that was no wider than this pulpit. I mean you would think it was the horse monster trying to kill this horse. Anything that looked like water, he ran, and he was just petrified of it.

I came up to the edge of that water and tried to get him to go across it and he just wouldn't budge. Keep that in mind and let me back up. Before I left, I was putting on my riding boots. I have two pair of boots. I have regular calf-high ropers and then I have big tall, what you call Buckeroo boots that are usually designed to tuck your levis in. And they act like a leg chap. You wear chaps but when you put this on it just adds more protection against brush, etc. I put on my regular ropers, and then the Spirit said, "Wear the high-top ones." I thought (I didn't know it was the Spirit) I just had a thought that I should put those high-top boots on, so I pulled those boots on and tucked my levis down in the top of them, because I was going to put spurs on. Then I had the feeling, "Pull your levis over the welt on the boot." "Wear the top of the boot under the levis." I didn't want to do that because usually it was a tight fit, but anyway, I did that. So I've got these boots that usually come up just below your knee and I've got my levis pulled down over them and I put the spurs on and the chaps on and we go riding.

I am coaxing this horse across this little stream. I can't get him to move. I'm on his back; he won't move; I'm doing everything I can to get him over there. Finally, I have an 8-foot lead rope and I got off the horse and walked over the stream and turned around and faced the horse and just said, "Come on, come on." Just trying to coax him over. All he had to do was step over like this, but he just wouldn't go. So I turned by back. And I had forgotten that when I turn my back I had this horse trained that the minute my back was turned he would start to follow me. So as I turned my back to get better footing, he jumped that creek and came right down on onto my leg. He didn't jump to the side. He came right down that rope and that rope was right here in the middle of my back. So I got 1,000 pounds of quarter horse that came down and his front started at the back of my knee and that hoof, that iron shoe rode from the back of my knee all the

way down my calf and ended at the back of the ankle. And he hit me with a shoulder and knocked me about 10 feet. And then he just stood there and looked at me like, "What are you doing down there?" Well, I knew it was hurt so I had another rider come over and I said, "Help me pull this boot off." I pulled that boot off and all the way from the back of my knee to my ankle was a plowed furrow about 1 inch deep, all the way down. It just ripped that muscle to shreds. So I pulled the boots off and just laid in that creek and thought, "If I get this nice and cold it won't be too badly damaged."

Here's the point. I came through it okay, horribly bruised, but nothing was broken. We had gotten the call to Philippines. Watch what had happened. If I had had that boot on the outside of my levis and that horse's hoof had come down and hooked that boot behind my knee, what do you think that would have done to that leg? It would have snapped that leg in half a dozen places slicker than a whistle. That little impression, "Pull your levis over the boot," allowed that boot to ride all the way down and not hook in the top of that boot. If it had, we wouldn't have been able to go on that mission. And all the good things that happened to us in that mission, all the things we were able to do to help others, wouldn't have happened, if I hadn't pulled the levis over the top of the boot.

That's how that works. Whosoever will hearken unto and hold fast to it will never perish neither will the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction. This is the key for everything we try to do to be successful members of the Church is learn to listen to that Spirit. And it will always, always lead to happiness and peace, and you'll successfully complete this.

Well, Brothers and Sisters, I found out these secrets the hard way. I've learned how to follow the Lord's voice. It's been a great blessing to me. It will lead you into places that are marvelous. All the blessings of the gospel are available but you must learn to listen to that one little voice and obey it and hearken unto it.

I love the Church. The Church is a hospital for the sick. I just can't understand why somebody would leave when everything that is good in our life up to that point was a result of their membership in the Church.

I'll make you a promise today. I have never met anyone who has walked away from church activity who loved and read the Book of Mormon daily. If you are reading that prayerfully, and you kneel down and talk to Father in the name of Christ before you read that book, you won't go away. You'll be able to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost through all trials and be able to successfully complete what we are sent here for. I testify to you that that's true.

Thank you for allowing me to come and share some things with you tonight. I love the Lord and I thank Him for His marvelous church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am thankful for prophets and apostles and am especially thankful for the Book of Mormon. And I say that in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.